YOU TOLD ME YOU WERE DIFFERENT

an anthology of harm

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edited by Kitty Robinson

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for o, who died without being heard

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Introduction

Until we find each other, we are alone.

Hunger, by Adrienne Rich

I don't want to have to explain why this anthology is necessary. It feels like a burden I don't know how to lift, let alone start staggering towards you, offering it outward. I don't know how to outline succinctly the intentions while maintaining the necessary clarity. I will try.

First and foremost, these stories are being shared for those who think they're alone. The second wave feminist concept of consciousness raising is central to the development to this book. The coining of this term was described by Anne Forer in 1967:

In the Old Left, they used to say that the workers don't know they're oppressed, so we have to raise their consciousness. One night at a meeting I said, 'Would everybody please give me an example from their own life on how they experienced oppression as a woman? I need to hear it to raise my own consciousness.' Kathie

[Sarachild] was sitting behind me and the words rang in her mind. From then on she sort of made it an institution and called it consciousness-raising.

In 2015, after an ideological shift from a queer & transgender-focused liberal feminist outlook to our shocking new discovery of second wave & radical feminist thought, my partner Max & I posted a small manifesto about these beliefs, began weathering the backlash, and immediately started asking other female people in our social circles a similar question: Would anybody here like to give an example from their own life on how they experienced harm while part of the queer community?

The answer was yes, and so began the slow, painful process of sharing these examples. We began forming different online discussion groups around this central concept of consciousness raising. We told our stories in these private spaces, or sometimes more publicly, on blogs or other social media. Sometimes we even managed to get together physically and talk about it freely for the first time face to face.

There were so many things to talk about. The subject of this anthology is only one of these topics, but is woven regularly throughout most of the most damaging patterns of behavior we'd all encountered during our time as members of the queer community. The topic is this - the harmful ways that male people who identify as trans treat female people within the queer and/or trans community.

We would never have used this language while being active members of this community - the designated language was "designated male/female at birth", "assigned male/female at birth" or "coercively assigned male/female at birth", usually abbreviated to amab/afab, dmab/dfab, & camab/cafab. You will see terms like these appear in some of the submissions. At the time, most of us would also not use pronouns based on sex, instead using preferred pronouns, including for people acting in emotionally and sexually abusive ways. You will also see this appear in some of the submissions.

When we started telling our stories, many themes came up. The most striking one was many, many stories of sexual & emotional misconduct - from online sexual

harassment & damaging, controlling friendships to sexually abusive relationships and rape. Again and again, a new person would join, recount their story, and ask the eternal question of those who've been hurt & had that hurt dismissed, ignored, or denied: Am I crazy?

No, we weren't. We traced the patterns together. We talked about what we had experienced, what we had witnessed, what had been done to us. We equally basked in the relief of no longer being alone, no longer feeling the need to repress every criticism, deny every hurt for fear that being hurt itself was anti-trans bigotry while also watching as the harms done to us were done to others. Our ability to name the cycle & escape it did not stop it from happening in full view every day. Another sexual predator outed, another confused & pleading post on social media by someone who doesn't understand why they're being hurt, another opportunity to reach out, sometimes productively, sometimes not.

We weren't crazy, but we felt crazy. Despite having intimate knowledge of why no one was willing to name the pattern of male violence (and mistreatment) from male trans people, to watch these incidents go excused,

justified or ignored is enough to make anyone who survived them feel insane. Those of us who spoke openly about our mistreatment, including rape and physical assault, were accused of lying, endlessly scolded for the language we used to talk about those who harmed us, and told speaking out about how we were harmed directly contributed to hate crimes against transwomen.

To be clear: as the editor, I am not trying to convince anyone that male trans people (whether trans women or nonbinary) are uniquely dangerous. Trans male violence & misconduct is just a subcategory of male violence & misconduct. The harms done by male trans people have a specific context to them (that of queer & trans ideology), the same way harms done by any other specific type of male person are surrounded by their own context. The title speaks to this - because there was a belief that these male people were different (read: not male), to identify their behavior as male violence was the ultimate taboo.

This anthology is our way of breaking the silence. The primary emotion expressed privately to me during the submissions process was relief, followed by fear.

Gratitude for a chance to tell the story, juxtaposed against the possibility of backlash, whether in the personal, professional, or academic sphere. Each of these submissions is from someone brave enough to tell the truth despite the knowledge of rape apologist backlash. Someone who wants other people hurting alone to know they're not really alone. Someone who has hope that there will be more understanding of the male/female dynamics in the trans & queer community that are so commonplace that become frighteningly predictable once you're familiar with them.

When we speak up about our experience, we're often met with the same few responses. The first is an insincere apology, accompanied by a dismissal of the pattern we have identified - "I'm sorry that happened to you, but you're an outlier." This response strips our experiences of political meaning, and this dismissal is completely incompatible with any feminist outlook. The core of consciousness raising is the idea that our experiences have meaning, they have a context in the world that can be named & explained. "Not all men/not all male people" is the bane of this radical act. We are

not individuals suffering in isolation at the hands of coincidence.

Another example of this is when someone tells us, "What, you don't think women can be abusive?" Of course, women can be abusive - there are female pedophiles, rapists, batterers & abusers of all kinds. The issue of intimate partner violence between female people is a neglected one in the LGBTQ community, especially the lesbian community. But this is not what was done to us. The sex-based power dynamics between a male trans person & a female person are transparently male/female. There is no escaping this - only obfuscating it.

One phrase that has haunted me during my time being victimized & organizing afterward is - "contributing to the myth of the predatory transwoman." As in, when you speak about what was done to you, you are contributing to the stereotype that transwomen are predators...even if the person who hurt you is a transwoman and is a predator. Otherwise known as, "even if it's true...you shouldn't say it." It is an effective trap - as a member of the LGBT community, it's impossible to not be familiar

with the patriarchal homophobic stereotyping of gender non-conforming gay men, including drag queens. To act as if a female person saying "I was preyed on" translates to "gender non-conforming male people are predators" is ludicrous. It's a blatant play to control survivor's speech.

A powerful silencing tactic, one that kept many of us silent & trapped for a long time, is to say that by speaking about abusive behavior from transwomen, you are contributing to their deaths. This idea of "killing transwomen" can take many forms, from blaming survivors speaking out for hate crimes committed by men (predominantly against black transwomen trapped in the sex industry), to the idea that "callout culture", now more often named as "cancel culture" results in the isolation & suicide of transwomen perpetrators. Additionally, there is a huge taboo against any police involvement if you're sexually abused by a transwoman because of the possibility of them ending up in a men's prison. When someone who has been victimized by a male trans person believes that male trans people are the most stigmatized, oppressed, at-risk people on the

earth, the act of staying silent about your abuse is positioned as the only morally good option.

This is not a beginner's guide to queer and trans ideology. It is not an invitation to voyeuristic pity. This collection focuses on a particular subset of male violence against female people that, by its nature, is un-nameable to those currently experiencing it. It's our stories, told for those who need to hear them. It's our anthology of harm.

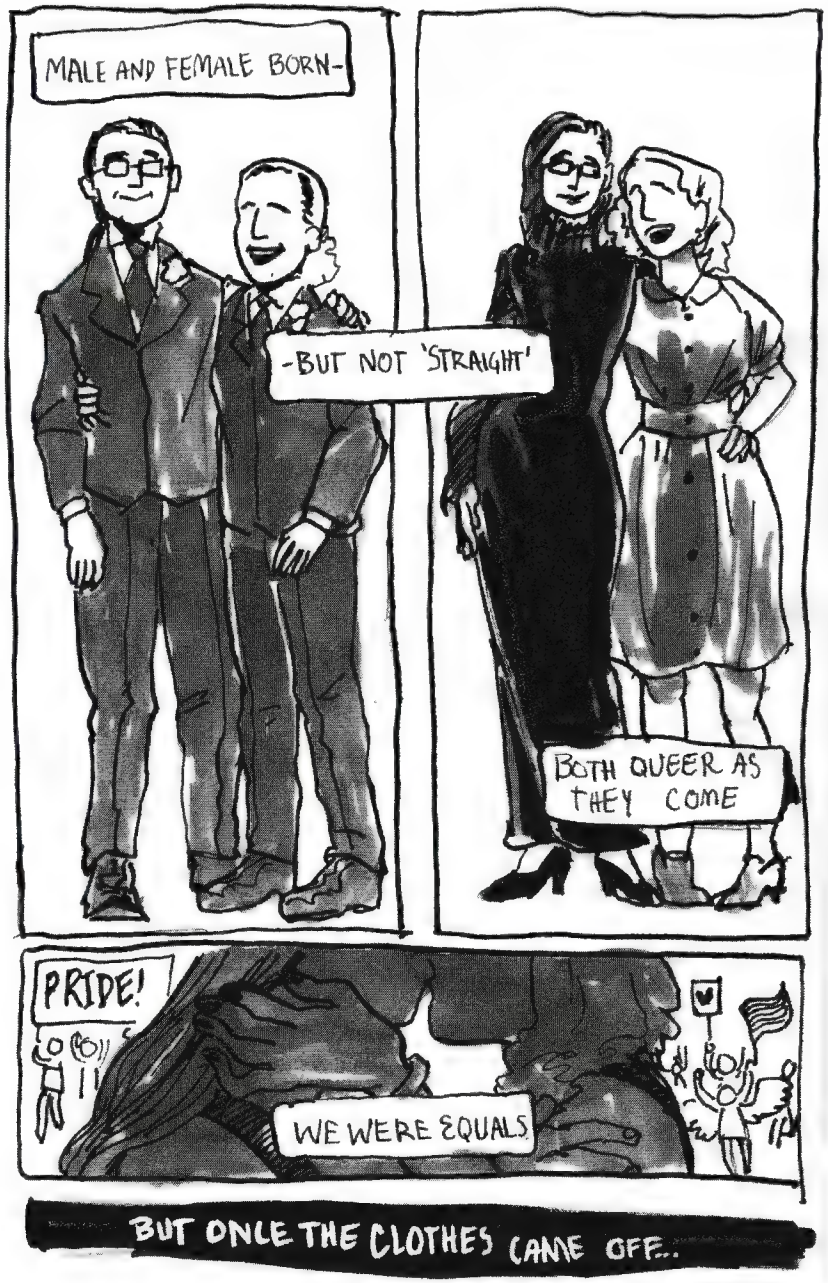
A WOMAN'S PLACE IS helping form change grow know better feel better look better always helping touching teaching creating imparting what you take you become | nurturing giving hatch evolve build progress slow it will happen it never doesn't happen swallow up the seconds minutes hours days years that you become | stared at looked at watched gaze imitate as you become | pure un selfish un thinking giving showing making cutting shaping re shaping her mind your mirror you become | being lesser being worse being dumb soft slow chip yourself down to her size her shape her intellect you become | at the center of the galaxy she creates for you it's you all you everything you take you become | reaching hoping wanting waiting it's unfair it's all unfair she knows she says i know you're waiting waiting waiting waiting waiting to become

and still

you haven't changed

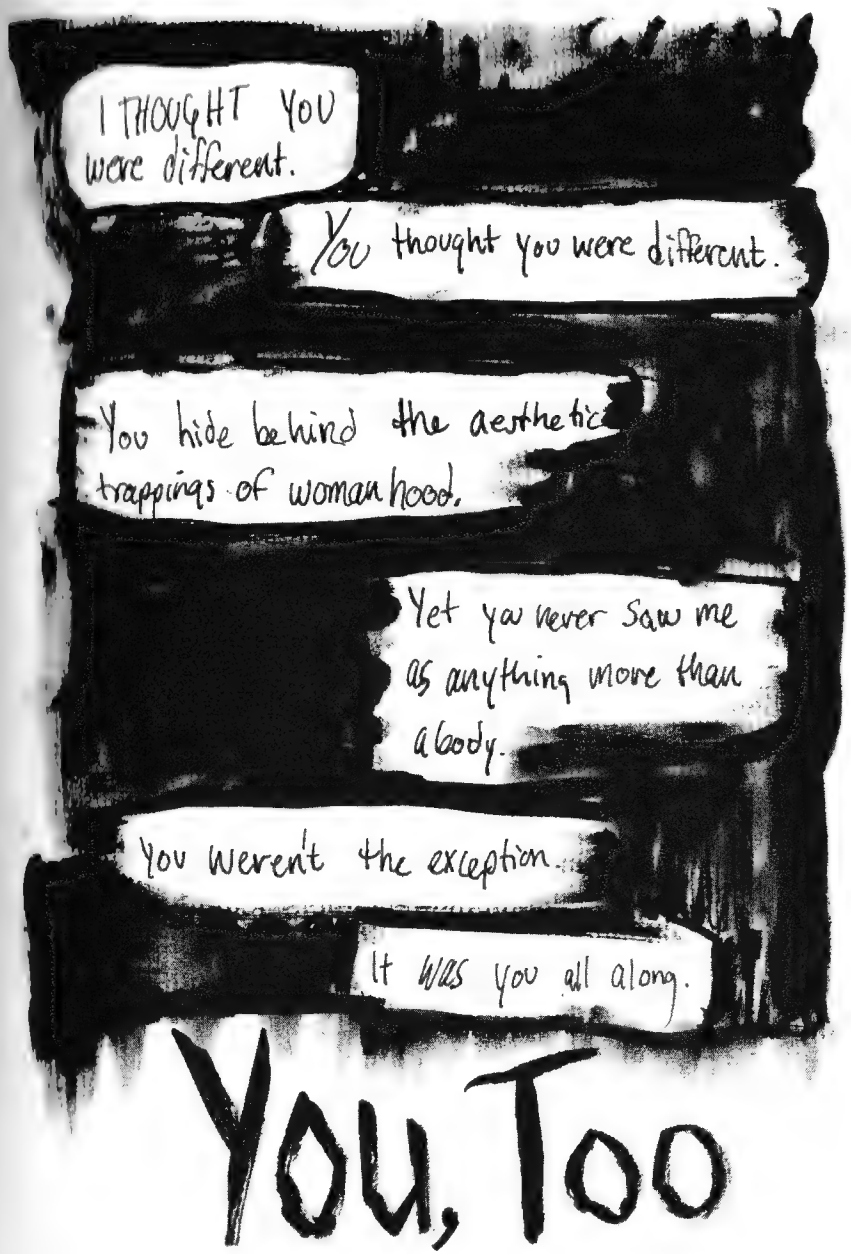
at all.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE DIFFERENT
YOU LIKED DRESSES
AND WORE HIGH HEELS.
AND LIKED MAKE-UP.
YOU GREW UP BEING CALLED 'FAG' FOR HAVING LONG HAIR AS A BOY
YOU WERENT ANY THING LIKE THEM


MALE AND FEMALE BORN-
-BUT NOT 'STRAIGHT'
BOTH QUEER AS THEY COME
PRIDE!
WE WERE EQUALS
BUT ONCE THE CLOTHES CAME OFF..

THERE WERE INCIDENTS —
COULD YOU GO SLOWER?
THAT HURTS...
YOU KNOW I DON'T LIKE WHEN YOU DO THAT!
UGH, NOT NOW...
I'M TRYING TO SLEEP!
— AND THERE WERE EXCUSES
I JUST WANNA MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD...
I... UH... FORGOT. SORRY.
YEAH, I KNOW, BUT I'M JUST GOING TO KEEP BEING SELFISH.

You LEFT SO MANY LITTLE FLAGS
I THOUGHT YOU UNDERSTOOD MY 'NO.'
W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I WAS WRONG.
BASTARD!
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU?!
NEVER WITHOUT A CONDOM!
YOU SURE FOOLED ME.


I THOUGHT YOU were different.
You thought you were different.
You hide behind the aesthetic trappings of womanhood.
Yet you never saw me as anything more than a body.
You weren't the exception.
It was you all along.
You, Too

I was so afraid of this. How many sessions has it been? Ten, maybe twelve. I told you so much. You listened. You were kind and thoughtful. Affirming. Comforting. I didn't tell you all of it but I told you a lot. I just wanted someone to hear me. I felt like I was going to choke to death holding those two years inside.

Pressure, control, manipulation, threats, lies, a hand raised, then lowered, raised again. Screaming at my flinching. Telling me he wished I dressed like a real girl so he could borrow my clothes. Inebriated rages, then sober ones. Ignoring my no. Forcing my legs open. Just a miscommunication. Hitting my dog, who I gave away to family, needing to protect my only friend, now alone. With him.

Weeks spent with nowhere to go but a friend's house. No home. No self-esteem. Embarrassing, ugly. The way he treated me, following me around every day, making me sick. My hair not falling out but me feeling like it should so I started pulling it. Hidden cuts healing under my long pants, humiliating. Not eating.

You understood. Until today, when I said: there is something I haven't told you that I need to talk about. You, calm, adjusting your glasses, saying okay. I say, he identified as a transgender woman.

You are well trained so your face stays mostly still, maybe you blinked. I saw something in your eyes but I don't know what it is. There is a silence I haven't encountered with you.

Then you say - she did?

I want to throw up. I want to die. I want to scream. He can't hear you in here. Your liberal friends can't hear you in here. I walked past two trans positive graffitis on my way to your office, the people who wrote them can't hear you. The city can't hear you. Your social media feed can't hear you.

I want to say, HE did. HE does. HE, remember? Remember that a man covered my voice with his own, smacked me around, raped me? Called me a stupid slut? Cheated on me? Remember that he's a man?

But I'm weak and stupid. So I just say, yeah.

Well, what did you want to talk about? You say. Just that, I guess. Well, you say kindly, of course women abuse other women. I am frozen. You keep talking. I say nothing. I can't remember what you said. Was I acting normal? Did you notice? What did I say?

Just like that I'm home again. Sitting on the floor in my kitchen. He is not a she. I didn't consent for you to curbstomp the return to reality I fought for. I hate myself for not explaining but I hate you more for not understanding. I will never go back to you. I will never go back to anyone like you. He couldn't hear you. But I did.

You ask me, "who hurt you?"

Do you truly want to know?

I started at a new school sophomore year. I was 15. HE was new to the school too. HE was 17. I met Blue through my friend Z. I met HIM because he was hanging out with Blue.

HE was too affectionate right off the bat. I gave HIM my hand to shake when I introduced myself. HE pulled me into a hug. HIS hand was on my butt. I told myself it wasn't on purpose. Now, I'm not so sure.

HE told me HE was ANNA and I told him I was Lars. I was still identifying as a trans man then, and extremely vulnerable. HE took advantage of that.

HE asked for my snapchat. I gave it to HIM. I didn't want to be rude. When I got home, HE asked me for nudes. I was 15. I said no. HE asked again. I said no. HE sent me a picture of HIS penis.

I cried.

HE told me if I didn't send pictures back, HE would report me to the police for possession of child pornography. I was scared. I didn't think. I just sent HIM the pictures.

HE said HE wanted my face in them. I was scared. I didn't think. I did what HE told me to. HE said it was hot that I was crying. HE took screenshots. When HE stopped replying, I thought I was in the clear. I thought it was over.

Then HE called me.

I was scared. I picked up the phone.

"I want to be your girlfriend."

I was scared. I said yes.

When HE had to go, HE told me HE loved me. I was scared. I told HIM I loved HIM too.

I took the longest, hottest shower I ever have that night. I scrubbed everywhere HE wanted to touch me raw. Every part of me HE saw that I hadn't wanted HIM to see.

The next day, HE held my hand every chance HE got. HE laid HIS head in my lap at lunch. I didn't want HIM to touch me.

That weekend, HE asked if I could go on a date with HIM. I was scared. I said yes. HE kissed me on that date. My first kiss. I hated it. I hated HIM.

I gnawed on my lips till they bled that night. I didn't break up with HIM until a month later. I was scared. I told HIM I thought we were better off as friends. HE was upset, but HE told me it was okay. It wasn't. I wasn't. HE dropped out a few months later. I cried, but this time of joy.

I told Blue what HE did to me. I didn't tell her it was HIM. She knew immediately. "Did ANNA do this?"

I cried.

HE hurt her, too.

Together, we blocked HIM on all social media. We blocked HIS number. We cut HIM out and found support in each other.

Mother, I embarrass you. Why? Maybe it's all things: a body battered and bloated. Brain the same. My unwelcome, painful birth. The fact I am a sister.

I have worked in the gay/queer community for the past seven years, and I am frequently working with transwomen from various agencies and organizations. For years, and up until not very long ago, I had deeply internalized the idea of transwomen being a group of people that are the absolute most marginalized, and my interactions were focused on uplifting, protecting, encouraging, validating transwomen above all others.

I had so many doubts and fears during this time about my own gender identity, about much of the rhetoric in liberal feminist circles, but the consequence for asking a single question would have been disastrous. My questions of why it was preferable to completely eliminate spaces for vulnerable women as opposed to starting a separate space for transwomen, why it was transphobic to not want to have sex with penises (I received a free pass on this – my history of child sexual abuse and sexual violence somehow makes it permissible for me. The only excuse for avoiding this violence is to have already experienced violence), why transmen didn't matter – indeed, why transmen only

mattered when they were being vilified or thrown under the bus for 'male privilege' – something that it was loathe to admit transwomen had, or had ever had.

On the heels of a traumatic and difficult breakup, I tried my hand at entering the queer dating scene and almost immediately met a transwoman – I had never dated a transwoman before, had never thought I would, had never been attracted to transwomen, but fearing the fact that these things would be obvious and brand me as some kind of traitor. I was looking to make new friends; I had no queer nor trans friends at this time, and she seemed nice – but from the moment she messaged me there was a sense of obligation to reply, to engage, to accept her offer to meet up.

Spending time with her, it was an overt and very conscious effort for me to think of her as female – something that caused me a huge amount of shame, which meant I overrode it and until now have never been allowed to look at it. Her way of speaking, of interacting with other women, of interacting with me, her expectations of me, her expectations of the world – all of these things felt 'male'. This is a gut feeling that is

so difficult to put into words when you're afraid to even speak up.

She told me often about physical violence in her last relationship. "I hit him, but he would hit me first," she'd say. She'd put her hand on the back of my neck and say, "but I would never hit you. I don't want you to think of me as violent," and then she would cry. On the tail of these admissions, of the implicit threat I felt was there, I would have to reassure her that I knew she was not capable of something like that. But she was - she had already done it, and here I was, expected to tell her that she didn't, and I did what was expected of me. She knew the relationship I had just left had been difficult and left me feeling very alone, and I feel, still, she used this to manipulate me.

She was obsessed with my body. Not with me, as a person – I was an accessory, the person she introduced to her friends as her 'trans boyfriend'. "He's a transman," she'd say as I shook someone's hand and said hello. "He's cuter than the last one you dated," her friend said back. They'd ask her if I was poly. I would feel my gut tightening. She would point out her friends that she had

slept with – all transwomen – and tell me cheerfully I could sleep with them too, it would be a 'fun thing' for her and her friends to share (a fun thing – my body. Me.).

She asked to watch me shower. I would say no. She would do it anyway. She would tell me she wished we could trade bodies, and I would say nothing back, sick with anger at the idea that she would think I ever wanted her body. She told me she had never met a transman who wasn't jealous of her dick. Au contraire.

I would wonder what I was doing there – the answer was serving her, performing these labours to keep her self-esteem lifted high, to convince her daily she was female. She would ask me what me and my female friends talked about. She would ask me probing, tone-deaf questions about the periods and cramps I used to experience (comparing them to her hormone treatment). She compared my hysterectomy (something that has, for a long time, caused me a huge amount of emotional pain) to her having difficulty getting erections on her hormones. She forced these same conversations on my friends, talking explicitly about her penis as if this

an experience all women should have. It made her laugh when we were uncomfortable.

She had no problem accessing the pieces of her masculinity that suited her. I was with her when she could drop her voice and yell 'HEY' to scare women who were moving too slowly or were in the way. She did this to me when I wasn't paying attention because it made her laugh how I jumped, how much it scared me to hear a man yell at me.

She had no idea who I was. It did not take long for all of these things to crush down on me and make me recognize how I was suffocating – I was not a person, I was Her Boyfriend - how I had to get out now before she actually, really hurt me. These realizations all happened in a blur. I didn't want to have sex with her, I didn't want to even touch her, I didn't want to look at her (I never, once, in the time that we dated, looked her in the eyes. I have intense difficulty with eye contact as is, but not to this degree, unless I am afraid. My own body was screaming warnings at me and I was deaf to it).

I was afraid of her. It's humiliating to admit these things now, to see how beaten down I allowed myself to be. Her body repulsed me before her personality did. I had quickly confessed to her early on that I was a victim of sexual violence in the hopes it would give me a pass from having to have any kind of sexual connection. I told her I was asexual before I even realized what I was saying. She said, "Me too," and told me the story of her rape while she broke down crying. Shaking from my own admission, I comforted her. She told me she had never and would never tell anyone again about her experience. I found out very quickly how much of a lie that was. How much of what she said was really a lie.

Two days later, she told me she never felt as safe as she did with me before. She told me of the transmen who had used her just for her body, then left when they got what they want from her. She told me she trusted me and loved me and I nodded my head like a simpleton because I knew what was coming next. Saying no would have been violence. Saying no to her because I was not attracted to her, did not want her, did not feel anything except cold around her, that would have been the worst

crime I could commit in this community. It isn't because of sexual abuse I didn't want to be with her, it was because she was a man. This was made horribly clear to me very fast and when the realization hit me, it came with a dead feeling of resignation.

She ignored me when I told her I had to go make a phone call, she ignored me when I tried to keep my shirt on, she smiled when I cried and told me 'I know, it's so beautiful', she ignored me when I went numb and stared at her DVD collection. She fell asleep while I cried again.

I don't know how much of my body is left to be taken away from me. I have never said out loud that she raped me. When I try to, the words turn to stone in my mouth. But she did. She did. She did.

I wish I had been strong enough and smart enough to leave sooner. I wish I didn't feel like I deserve to carry this weight with me because I was so stupid. But I do. I do. I do.

It was my sign that I had to leave right now - and I stayed for two more weeks, because I was afraid.

I told her later again that I was asexual. Again she said, "Me too," then would send me countless, unwanted, unsolicited nude photos all day while I was at work. I stopped answering my texts because I was repulsed by what I saw. My mental health was already in a rapidly deteriorating state but any sign of distress from me would cause her to 'disassociate' and require my full attention unless I wanted her suicide on my hands. One night, when I told her I needed space, desperately, she walked to my house in the middle of the night and cried outside my door until I let her inside. I felt nothing but numb all the time. It seemed like she was concretely rooted in my life now, because no matter what I said to her, she would inevitably do only what she wanted.

This all occurred over a rapid span of two months – the time escaped from me and I was anxiously asking my friends how to leave her. My best friend told me she was worried for me, that she saw changes in me, that she had been worried since early on but too afraid to say anything. I broke up with her over the phone – I told her we needed to focus on ourselves, I had just recently left a very long and toxic relationship, that I could not take

care of her, that we should be friends, that I wasn't happy. Her reply was, "Well, I'm happy – you can't just hold out for me?" Then, as ever, I only mattered as a body to serve her.

After leaving her, she posted messages online and texts saying foul, vile things about me. She called me her sloppy seconds. She said I was just like every other man in her life who had 'gotten a taste' and left. This is still darkly funny to me. Her sexuality was so aggressive, so self-serving, and so oblivious to my pain and discomfort and fear that even now, it is the only thing that mattered to her, the only thing she ever wanted, and the thing she had laid so many lures to trap me with.

The behaviours in her I immediately had recognized as male socialized – her selfishness, her arrogance, her entitlement, her violence, her self-serving and belligerent sexuality, her claims that she could perform womanhood better than my friends (because they don't wear makeup nor dresses), her insistence I stand at her side and allow myself to be shown off to her friends like a new trophy (I was someone new, someone from outside the community, a brand new commodity), her

ownership of my body, her quiet ways of turning me into less of a person and more her caretaker, her complete ignorance of female sexuality but her apparent birthright to mouth off about it and claim it as her own, her belief that womanhood is distilled down to makeup and long hair and girl talk – these are stories I see everywhere now, commonalities in so many narratives.

I feel very alone in my experiences even despite that fact – this is not something I can ever talk about in person, not in this detail. It has been made to be my fault, or something I should move past (because, to quote one friend, 'it's not like she actually ever hit you, is it?'), or something that was a strange abnormality and not at all reflective of transwomen. There are various reasons that I am met with these schools of thought; trust me, I know, because I think them myself whenever the words try to come out.

But ultimately, I know what happened to me, and I know who did it to me.

Entertainment Center by Anonymous

There was the time that we brought an entertainment center home

For our new TV

And your friend was visiting us

And I wished he wasn't

Because I didn't want him to see how I knew you were going to behave

When we started to put that stupid fucking entertainment center together

It had a lot of pieces

That wouldn't easily fit together

It didn't take long for you to lose your temper

Maybe your friend couldn't tell

But I watched the frustration build in you

Watched your movements become jerkier and tenser

Heard the slight change in your tone

Saw the anger in your eyes as you threw plastic screws to the ground

"I'll take over, I can do it" I assured you

I tried and tried and tried to hastily slap the shelves together

But it's like the pieces were working against me

My hands started to cramp

And I had to take a break

So you continued on, unsuccessful, your frustration only making the work harder.

You're cursing and yelling

Your friend is laughing, he thinks it's funny

I'm trying to think of ways to calm you down

Looking for the perfect combination of words to sew together

but I feel my voice getting caught in my throat

Why don't you take a little break? What can I do to help? Do you want some water?"

Sometimes, if I stay calm, you'll stay calm

Sometimes, if I stay calm, it feels like everything will be ok, like I'm actually the one controlling the situation

Sometimes.

"JUST SHUT UP! I DON'T NEED A FUCKING BREAK AND YOU CAN'T HELP! JUST GO! I GUESS I HAVE TO DO IT ALL. I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING EVEN THOUGH YOU PROMISED YOU WOULD HELP!"

I stand there just a few feet away, feeling the anger burn off you in little heat waves, feeling like it might burn me too

You run to our bedroom, slam the door and I hear you start to cry

I feel bad. I feel angry. I feel guilty.

I push past the pain in my hands from fiddling with the hard plastic pieces of a cheaply made piece of furniture and after a long time, it's done

Your friend goes back to comfort you and eventually

You both come out of the bedroom.

You seemed to have calmed down

But I'm still nervous.

And humiliated

And tired.

God, I am so tired of not knowing

When the atmosphere is going to shift

When I'll say or do the wrong thing

When you'll scream

Or storm out

Or smash something

[illegible] the smallest inconvenience

[illegible] a home improvement project

[illegible] set you off

[illegible]denly your friend looks at me and says

"[illegible]ll to be honest I wasn't sure if you guys would last long term. But after seeing how well you handled that, you're definitely ready for marriage!"

He laughs

And you laugh

And I guess

in an attempt to break the tension

I laugh too

And for a long time I can't stop thinking

about how my ability to survive your loud, scary and oftentimes violent temper tantrums

Is somehow a good indication of how well I will do as a wife

From 2014-2018, I attended a small liberal arts college. My sophomore year, I lived in a suite (very close dorm-style housing, where 6 people share a common area and restrooms) with five self-described queer punks: four nonbinary AFAB people and one transgender woman. I had spent my entire life until then variously identifying as bisexual or lesbian, and figured it would be good to be around LGBT(QUIA... whatever the acronym was at that point) company. I had also intermittently struggled with ye olde anxiety/depression, and everyone else living there had some form of mental illness or neurodivergence, which occasionally allowed for some productive commiserating.

We all joked about how close we were, and considered ourselves a queer family, to the extent that we got out of having to set up rotating chore schedules with our RA because we were clearly all on such good terms. I somehow emerged as the "group mom." Despite not having a license, car, or even being old enough to drink, the idea appeared in my head somehow that for being more privileged (for being the most cisgender?) or less

mentally ill than my roommates, I owed it to them to help them with their various struggles in whatever way I could. Which usually meant that I would go out for smokes at all hours with the transgender woman, Alice.

My freshman year, before I really knew anyone else in the group, Alice had been in an abusive relationship, with an ex she described as "a physically and sexually abusive transphobic piece of shit" but who was another nonbinary AFAB person. The worst thing, as she described it, was "group gaslighting" – that this ex, and the ex's three close friends (their "crew"), had all ganged up on her, all claiming a distorted version of what had happened to Alice – allegedly, that the ex had hit her in the face during an argument, and broke into her room and left a folding pocketknife on her bed as a threatening act.

The stories got more and more severe as time went on and as people validated Alice in her experiences & survivorship, where eventually her story became "I am a survivor of sexual assault because a very drunk person I was very attracted to tried to kiss me once, without asking first." The incident happened in a staircase, and

she made a big point to have dramatic public flashbacks [illegible] to stairs.

[illegible] would happily tell you all of this over a cigarette.

Her abuser and comics were two topics always on her mind.

We started dating after she climbed into my lap while watching cartoons. She insisted on polyamory and described herself as hypersexual.

One of the things that she said she liked about me was that I was bigger and stronger than she was. I had always been a tomboy, and when I identified as a lesbian I thought of myself as rather butch, which she said was especially validating of her own gender identity, that she was "more femme" than me.

At the same time, the amount of time and energy I spent on her continually increased. I knew that she was never going to do her own laundry, so instead of looking at the same dirty and wrinkled piles I started doing it myself – including folding it and putting it away. She only ever ate the same few meals, and I took to fussing over

whether or not she had eaten that day. She had problems being up on time for class and was frequently tardy or absent – so I started spending my break periods waking her up and bringing her food when I should have been studying for my own academic success. She was chronically nocturnal, so even her smoke breaks often kept me up until 3 or 4 am, often when I had class at 8.

My junior year, the group moved into a house together, rented out as a dorm by the school. I found a secondary partner, a badass lesbian who is still my best friend, and so did she. We drifted apart, romantically and sexually, though we spent the same amount of time together – not that that did anything to mitigate her jealousy.

She staged very elaborate "panic attacks" in common house areas when my secondary partner and her secondary partner hung out, even if it was just to study. She was yelling in a public area one night when I pointed out to her that maybe yelling like that could be triggering or distressing to our other housemates. She immediately snapped: "Why, because I sound like a man?" In her mind, I immediately became a transphobe, as well.

Everything started to fall apart when I pointed out to her that her jealous and possessive behavior over these other people was unhealthy. She began to call what I was doing gaslighting. She didn't see herself as possessive, so if I tried to tell her she was, clearly I was trying to alter her own memories against her. Or something.

Of course, because we all lived together and shared a friend group, everything got needlessly messy. Alice would pull random housemates into our disputes – she claimed to have always been afraid of me, had feared me "boiling over" and always felt like I was "bubbling up" with anger. (Her words, during a mediated discussion.)

She asked one person if they had noticed my door shutting harder than usual or me running ("stomping") up the stairs, and the "I guess so" in response turned into "I and others have noticed your physically aggressive behavior." Gone were the days of her complimenting my size or strength or purported masculinity. Now the trait was weaponized against me.

At the same time, I started looking for varied perspectives on her narrative of her freshman year and her "abuser." I asked a coworker who lived on the same floor as them both that year, but was otherwise completely outside of the situation, how he had perceived it. He said that he was never really sure, but that he had witnessed Alice throwing a lamp at her ex through an open dorm door.

So much for the defenseless victim narrative I spent two years hearing and believing night and day. A narrative began coalescing in my mind – the people who were "group gaslighting" her were really just trying to hold her accountable. There wasn't some secret and coordinated plot to undermine her sense of reality – she was just the only person who refused to see how what she was doing was wrong.

I began tentatively reaching out to the "abuser" who I had spent years fearfully keeping watch for. We got coffee and talked. My heart was racing the entire time.

As it turns out, they had slapped her in the face, once – but from the other perspective, she had been screaming

in their face, and they did not know how else to make it stop.

They did leave a knife on her bed in her dorm room – a knife that had been entrusted to them by Alice so she would not use it for self-harm, which was being returned after going no-contact.

All of the stories that Alice had portrayed as threatening acts, or as coordinated group attempts to confuse her, made perfect sense, when heard from a perspective other than hers. What she described to me for years as "group gaslighting" was her insisting that things could not have been any other way than how she saw them, even if everyone else involved in a scenario disagreed. Her own victimhood was paramount, and if anyone tried to convince her otherwise, they were abusive. I felt deflated.

There was even more to it than that, but the mere mention of some parts would set Alice off into a spiral for days, so I never brought them up to her. Her deflection tactics had been effective on me. I was horrified.

At the end of it, I apologized to Alice's "abuser." They responded saying it was really me they felt sorry for. In fact, they had only "dated" for a month, after hooking up twice – almost nothing, by college standards.

In all, I sunk two years – or half of my expensive liberal arts education – into our relationship. All I have to show for it is the hard-earned lesson to not put others' needs before my own. The experience of everything unraveling at the end – all because I dared to challenge one of her behaviors, rather than continue to allow it at my own emotional expense – caused me to doubt my own reality so hard I finally started keeping a devoted journal, just so I could keep everything she was saying straight.

In this telling of the account, I use the preferred pronouns of all involved, including Alice. I want to respect the chosen pronouns of my other housemates and AFAB friends. But at the same time, I cannot neglect the effect that male privilege or self-centeredness or whatever you want to call it had – Alice insisted she was right, and that anyone who disagreed with her had to be malicious. She refused to hear a narrative other than her own.

AFAB female, whatever you want to call it – I cannot imagine anyone who underwent female socialization being that certain in the face of such overwhelming disagreement. Every woman I know is taught from birth to consider others' viewpoints first, to cater to others' emotional outbursts. Like I did.

Not only was Alice seemingly incapable of doing so, but she spent years insisting that this "crew" of all-AFAB people were the ones who were wrong, that any times their perspective diverged from hers (in which she was the only truly "valid" victim) it was clearly a coordinated attempt on their part to abuse or gaslight her, to make her doubt her reality. Of course.

The alternative, of her taking responsibility for her part in a brief and explosively unhealthy situation, was so unthinkable that she spent two years deflecting it, using me as a shield and continuing to harass the others involved.

My senior year, I felt like I had to re-learn to make friends. I had sunk so much time into this black hole of emotional labor that being able to focus on my own

needs felt luxurious. On my college campus, Alice was far from the last person I would know who would use similar tactics.

AMAB trans people who used "they" pronouns would get away with all kinds of abusive and bizarre behavior, and because they were so "femme" for wearing the occasional thrifted skirt, everyone else checked their privilege and averted their eyes, chalking it up to the stresses of living in a transmisogynistic society causing them to lash out or develop mental illness or drug-using habits. No matter what you want to attribute it to, I saw the pattern everywhere: people raised to take the emotional work of women for granted gleefully doing so when 21st-century gender labels allowed them to do so without guilt.

Gradually, I built up a friend base of chill people, gay and straight men and women and all kinds of people in between. I made a handful of AMAB trans friends willing to have constructive dialogue on the differences between their experience and an AFAB person's. I've had a few casual relationships, but I'm still learning how to

a serious one while maintaining my own physical emotional needs first.

all, even if I wasted half my college years, I came okay.

there's a commonly held belief in leftist spaces that abusers are unforgivable. they should be excommunicated, ostracized, socially executed in the most gruesome way possible. abusers are some of the worst of the worst. how many performative tweets have you seen calling for the deaths of all abusers?

however, no one's been able to explain to me why i have to respect my abuser's pronouns.

it's one of those things where i don't know how to approach the subject. it's part of why i haven't taken the time to recount my story in detail outside of private spaces with other women who have stories like mine, who bear scars like mine.

on one hand, i learned long ago that proper pronouns were paramount to respecting not just someone as a person, but their very status as a human being. misgendering evolved from a rude and painful faux pas to being almost indistinguishable from a hate crime, regardless of whether or not it was intentional.

on the other hand, using my abuser's pronouns feels like giving in to someone else's demands one more time, my own feelings be damned.

i spent years catering to and being manipulated by a wolf in sheep's clothing, a narcissist as textbook as they come, cloaked under the guise of a pitiful creature that couldn't hurt a fly.

i buried my needs and sorrows six feet deep to care for someone who barely thought of me as a person, taking advantage of my love and empathy and giving nothing back. i watched my abuser work to erode my sister's self-esteem, her faith in her own abilities, her very sense of who she is, even after the lengths she went to, to prove she was a good friend despite her own struggles.

as soon as i stood up for myself, tired of being used and disrespected, my abuser took every vulnerability i shared, every wound that had yet to heal, and drove a dagger straight through. when my sister came to my defense, my abuser turned friends and family against her in a devastating smear campaign; some of the aftershocks can still be felt even now, months later.

when we finally left, my abuser did whatever possible to tear us apart on the way out, claws through skin and teeth through flesh. yet still, we escaped.

knowing that my abuser had other victims who suffered so much more than i did makes me feel like i outran freddy krueger. like the final girl, i was victimized, yet still intact. it could've been worse, i tell myself, though i don't know for whose benefit.

according to the current political landscape, after all that happened and all that i went through, it's acceptable to hate my abuser, damn my abuser, or think of my abuser as little more than an empty, soulless husk

yet what i want to know is this:

why is it that i can call my abuser a monster, but not a man?

I tried to say he shouldn't come but he came. My partner talked me into it because he had already broken her. We were "poly"; she had a relationship with me while they took turns exploiting her. I should have been strong but I was not strong enough.

"I don't think she's a good partner," "I think she's emotionally abusive", weak words of a weak woman (then a weak man", if we're playing fast and loose). What we called abuse was all so complex back then. He came to our house. We all sat in his car in a parking lot we never sit in anymore, one that used to be one of our favorites.

He didn't know how to talk to me and he didn't like me, though I tried to be pleasant (in poly, you support your partners' other relationships, especially if you're a primary- the primary suspect). We went home, to my partner and my home, one we had made without him, one he'd never set foot in.

He raped my partner in our bed while I sat on the couch in the next room. I didn't know he was raping her or I wouldn't have just sat there, I hope, but I guess I don't know.

When a guy molested my best friend in high school in her sleep, I just laid there. I couldn't move. We were in a room full of people and no one reacted either. I don't

know if they saw. I couldn't move. Really couldn't move. I didn't know what tonic paralysis was until later.

I didn't know what happened. Trapped, I convinced myself I didn't see, that what I did see wasn't real, but in the morning he told her what he did and I could not deny what I hadn't done. Writing this I remembered the shorts she was wearing. I wish I hadn't. They were white.

Later my best friend got touched that same way (what, if I ever talked about it, I'd call digital rape) again. I was in the next room. I didn't know or I hope I would have done something, but I guess I don't know. She met the guy through my friends.

Afterwards, when she told his secret, he told everyone he was a woman and they felt very sorry for him. They didn't feel sorry for the woman he touched until she fell asleep, the woman who had been touched like that before.

That other man, the one from the beginning (you don't have to keep track; they run and run and run together) raped my partner in our bed a few months later. That was when my partner still called him her girlfriend.

She called the man who once got her pregnant raping her (I thank her body for the mercy of miscarriage) in her sleep her girlfriend. I called him that, too. He liked to

be called a girl though he was an adult man. Didn't take estrogen then, though I think he might now.

We were all very progressive so we called everybody whatever they wanted and my partner dated whoever wanted to date her. Nobody rapes her anymore because we stopped letting men inside our houses or our lives, no matter what they like to be called.

We don't date anyone but each other. We're lesbians for real this time, the kind of lesbians who cannot get pregnant by "mistake". It's over now, getting raped, maybe. Hopefully. Men do most of them, mostly to women they know, and we don't know men anymore.

The longer that passes without incident, the more I see that I will always know I am a coward who has held still while boys or men rape the women I love most. I can feel my stillness in those moments always, my bottomless ability to let the worst violations happen feet away, knowingly or unknowingly, did know or didn't know, could know or couldn't know. The hollowness of facing what I lack does not leave me. Tonic paralysis rings hollow, rings of weakness. Weak, weak, weak.

I compulsively write "with a moral", something to impart, but I can make no moral out of what I saw. I kept thinking it might make me brave - then, though, why would I keep failing? I cannot honestly make any sense of it at all. None of us will ever stop feeling the

consequences all through our bodies, all through us. It never stops happening. It is always happening. Nobody ever raped me, not really, not in a way I'd count (statutory counts unless it's me and then I can promise you I was in total control) but I didn't get away. Nobody got away.

I want so badly to be good

I want so badly to be good

I want so badly to be good

I want so badly to be good

and it's all been about that, the loving and the fearing and the philosophy, it all boils down to a dog's wish sun that every planet inside me turns around and around no matter what else the millions of little women on each of them are cooking for dinner

is it good to want to be good? Is it good to want it more than anything? Is my dog good because she wants to be or do I think wanting makes her good because it's what I want, too? The "good dog" is a foundational truth in my world but my own goodness is accessible only by jumping pillows across a lava floor and more often than not I learn later the pillow was lava too only I didn't

it then. How could I? How can I be good? How can good? Why does the floor have to be lava?

reconcile my own dog's wish with my own dogs' and, just as much as I hate to not be good (I not to say the B-A-D word), I hate the conciled. Loose ends are contamination to me and always utilize universal precautions when I approach one - to do otherwise would not only hurt lings but risk plunging through my skin the needle in haystack which could destroy me.

idea of "queerness" as an ill-defined pile of concilable contradictions, challenging to the norm virtue of its lawlessness incomprehensibility, is utterly sacrilegious to me. Something has got to be real and from where I stand, what he did was something no woman can do. No woman. Not only a few. None of them. The people I am, the people I love, women?

Women can't rape your girlfriend with their penises, and they can't get her pregnant. A woman cannot hold her erection to your best friend's back. Women can't send you pictures of their penises, expecting you to tell them how much you'd like to suck them. I'm a woman, and the worst I'm capable of doesn't look like that. It looks nothing like that. I could not be more grateful it looks nothing like that.

My lesbianism makes total divine sense; what we share is defined in perfect exacting detail and I love the way we define it and I hate all attempts to smear something so exhilaratingly precise into something beyond understanding. I see lawlessness as a self-indulgent myth spoken by the powerful, who have no need to define the structure which allows them to do anything they want, or else a weak-hearted dodge of the deluded victim who thinks naming reality might create it.

We are social creatures who arrange ourselves according to definable rules. Failing to define the rules can indicate only arrogance or cowardice. With monastic dedication (I like to think) I refuse to look away from the questions I can't answer. The answer exists, has existed always and will always exist. The answer has already made you king or leper - damned by power either way - whether you look it in the face or not.

So am I a good dog or a bad dog?

SOMETIMES THE MOST ROMANTIC THING
YOU CAN SAY TO SOMEONE IS
"I DON'T WANT TO FUCK YOU EITHER."
WE SENT EACH OTHER LOCKS OF HAIR
TIED TOGETHER WITH SEA FOAM SYNTHETIC YARN
I KEEP YOURS IN A SMALL BOTTLE ON A CHAIN
LIKE A TALISMAN OF
CREATION/DESTRUCTION

GIVE ME A WAY TO BE FAR THAT DOESN'T HURT
CLEANING UP THE BACK OF
YOUR/HIS/HER/THEIR/MY
NECK WIPING
YOUR/HIS/HER/THEIR/MY
BANGS ASIDE
LAYING MY HANDS AGAINST
YOUR/HIS/HER/THEIR/MY
FACE FEELING BONE AND FLESH FEELING
BLOOD FLOW HEART RATE
SWALLOWING MY TONGUE SLICING
YOUR/HIS/HER/THEIR/MY
EAR OPEN

GIVE ME A WAY TO BE CLOSE
THAT DOESN'T HURT
AMIDST
HIM/HIM/HIM
ARE STILL PIECES OF YOU
THE HEAVY CARE THAT STICKS
TO THE SLICK SWEAT OF MY SKIN
ITCHING ALL DAY LONG
UNDER COLLARS UNBEARABLE
CRADLE KINDNESS IN MY MOUTH
LET HER SPILL INTO MY BED BELLY

MAYBE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME
YOU HAVE EVER TOUCHED ME
MAYBE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME
I HAVE EVER BEEN TOUCHED
I PAY SEVEN EXTRA DOLLARS
FOR THE SHAMPOO & CONDITIONER
(EVEN THOUGH I KNOW
THE WATER WILL BE TOO HOT)
TO FEEL FINGERS ON MY SCALP
TO BE TAKEN CARE OF

TELL ME HOW IT LOOKS FROM BEHIND

[illegible] love had blond hair like cornsilk. we were the [illegible] height, the same weight and build, and we used to [illegible] each other's clothes. it was very punk rock. I had a [illegible] dress with little white hearts on it that he loved. I thought nothing of it. it bothered me more when he said things like he wished he had breasts so he could play with them when he was alone. I was so naive; it didn't occur to me that he was expressing a fetish.

he was my first sex. it was good, really. I loved him. i could spend this whole essay trying to convey the intensity of that love, which was maybe more a need to be desired, to be valued as a sex object, something like that. other times the sex wasn't so good. once, we both got so drunk and high that we couldn't have intercourse.

he asked me for a blowjob and I was too fucked up to figure out how to refuse. to this day I think of that night when I have someone else's cock in my mouth. so mostly I've just stopped giving blowjobs. another time his mother came to his apartment with us, and he coerced me into sex he knew I didn't want as soon as she was out

the door. a few days later, she and I ate grilled cheese sandwiches together in silence.

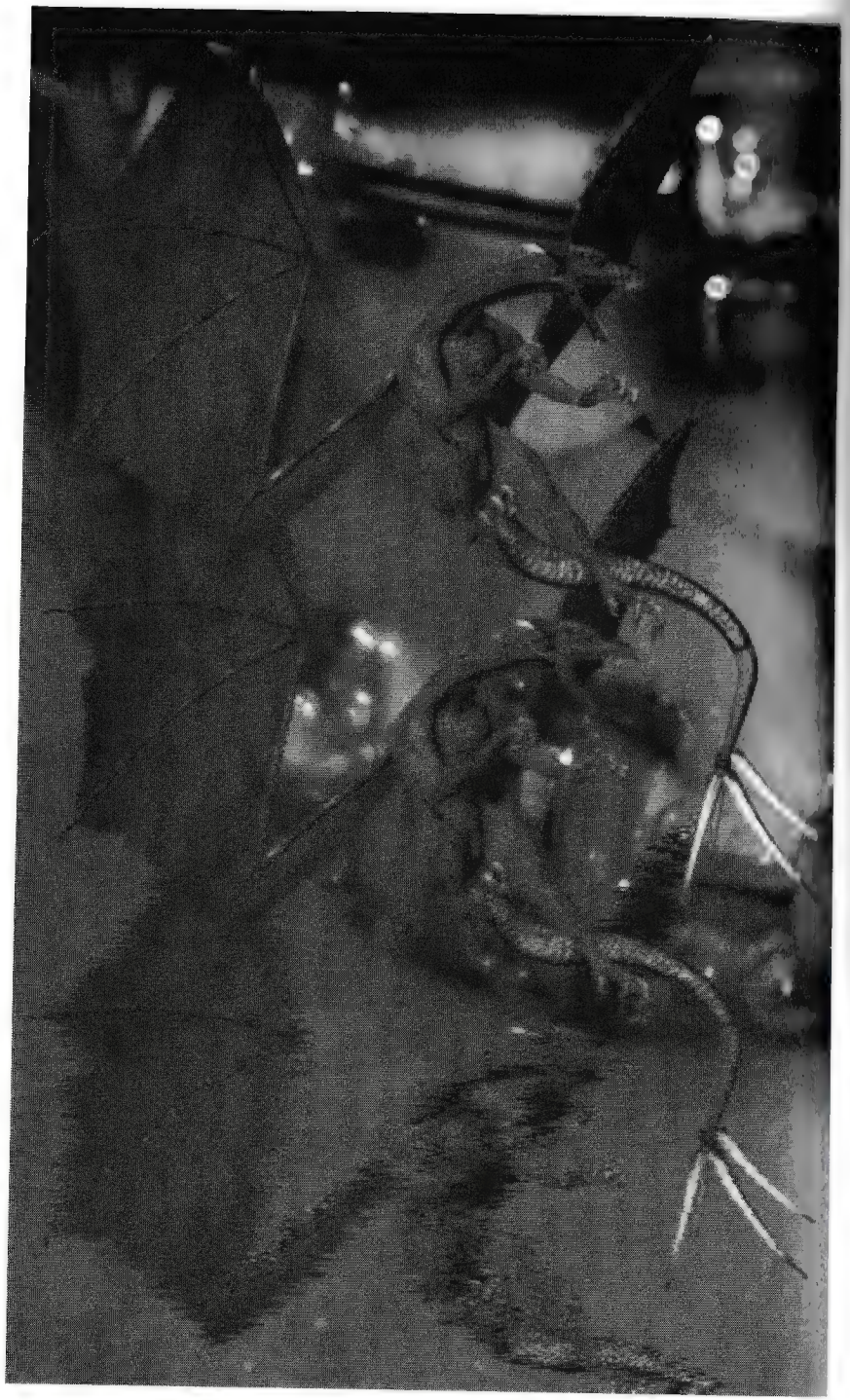
anyway. I came into that relationship fresh out of my repressive, abusive, catholic upbringing. he treated me like crap, and I stayed. the oldest story in the book. I got mine, but paid a high price and had to spend a lot of time drinking it away after he was gone.

the last time we talked on the phone, he told me he thought he was non-binary. I bit my tongue. eventually he deleted me off facebook, and a while after that, he came out as a woman. there was no need to bite my tongue by then.

when we were friends post-breakup, he started doing some work with other men at his university about porn and porn addiction. knowing that he was taking steps to be a better man was more healing than any apology. Then, the second he found out that there was activist cred in talking about his experiences as a "gender minority", all the feminist ally work stopped. the fucker suddenly more oppressed than the fuckee. I saw him at his most vile, most male. if it's bigotry to refuse to

[illegible] that he is my Sister, then my hands are tied. like the girls in the videos he liked.

[illegible] him in my body still, a parody of motherhood, but still one he can never understand.



You raped someone, you hit someone. Your parents had a maid and you'd been using the donations for video games. That kind of thing. You had my underage nudes (and those of countless others). We weren't close.

You were like, I'm suicidal and need nudes to live, and I was like, oh my god, you poor girl, do you mind if I'm FTM? And you were like, that'll work! And you didn't kill yourself, so I guess it did.

Everyone liked you before, but you said nobody liked you after. How were you supposed to get better if you didn't have anyone to help? I wanted to help.

We texted for about a week before I mentioned I was eating a sandwich and you said you wanted to literally eat me, like a dragon, which you were. You considered yourself to be a dragon. Eating people, I gathered, was very erotic to dragons. I didn't want to get eaten by a dragon, so I stopped texting back.

16 year olds are pretty stupid but I guess there's a limit. I made no meaning of this experience and continued living my life exactly as I had been, which didn't turn out great.

I had never personally met B, but I had heard so many stories. It was one of those open secrets that often go unconfronted in the LGBT community. Whispers of rape and sexual assault, particularly of minors and trans-identified females. Interestingly enough, he identified as a woman among his close circle of friends, but in most public spheres he identified as a man. Of course, by interesting I mean B's motives were entirely transparent.

He took advantage of gender identity ideology to be whatever gender gave him the most social capital at any given moment. B made no attempts to physically pass as a woman, and his behavior was characteristically male as well. Even on the local Pride staff website, he was listed with his male name and he/him pronouns. Yes, B was on Pride's staff as a Youth Coordinator no less. He even flew to Russia on their dime to help open a youth LGBT center there. Several of my friends and I were outraged that B was still allowed to be a public figure in the LGBT community despite being a serial rapist. We set out to do something, and do something we did.

We first collected testimonies from individuals who had been victimized by him. All testimonies were anonymous which was not ideal for our purposes, but we wanted to do right by his victims. We then found the email addresses of all the higher ups at the various non-profits he claimed to be employed at and sent them all the same email with the testimonies attached imploring them to remove him from their staff.

First of all, one of the trans-identified females we emailed told us that as far as she knew, B had only ever attended a single event with their organization. Secondly, she informed us that she had forwarded our email to her lawyer to see if what we said about B was slander. She was all too ready to defend one multiply-accused male from the anonymous accusations of countless females at the drop of a hat. So much for being an activist. So much for LGBT groups being above the kinds of victimization that other activist circles are so often rife with.

The main group that we were concerned about getting through to was, of course, the Pride staff. B absolutely could not be allowed to have a leadership role among

LGBT youth any longer. They took a full day to respond whereas the other groups answered the same day we sent the email. The response came from the president of the board, a male, who told us that he would recommend "any individual who believes any criminal activity has occurred should immediately contact law enforcement" and that the board "does not have investigate [sic] powers, nor should it be in a position of enforcing laws."

He further said that their "looking into this matter" would require direct contact with the accusers. Interesting that this man would suggest contacting law enforcement given that an activist worth his salt would know that going to the police about sexual assault--even if the accusers are many--is often a retraumatizing exercise in futility.

According to statistics found on RAINN's website--naught but a Google away, Pride staff!--only 46 reports of rape out of 1000 lead to arrest. Of those, 9 cases will be referred to prosecutors. 5 cases will lead to a felony conviction, and finally 4.6 out of every thousand rapists will be incarcerated. With those odds, why go through

the immense pain of prosecuting? Furthermore, we never once asked Pride to enforce any kind of laws. We just asked that B no longer have access to vulnerable LGBT kids.

Despite his imploring us to essentially out our victims, we found that several days later, B's name was gone from the Pride website, and his Facebook account was gone.

We don't know for certain what happened to lead Pride to remove him from the staff without our further engagement. Perhaps B owned up to what he had done. Maybe other people on the board had already heard rumblings. Whatever the case, we were proud to have gotten one abuser taken out of a leadership position, but unfortunately countless others are still out there using their trans identity as a means to gain access to young, impressionable females.

Where serial rapists are concerned, it takes a village to take them down. For how big of an epidemic serial rape is in activist circles, who knows? Maybe it takes the whole world.

a wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf by cyborg dyke

I followed the radical lines and I tried to follow them to the root, and I found myself following all these faceless talking heads, and they told me that wolves were bad and sheep's clothing made a sheep and sheep were good, so I tore off my binder and put on brightly colored makeup and tried to follow the most radical path I could.

I listened to you and I liked you and I validated you and I debated with you and you made me think and I gave you my ideas and I believed you, I believed you even though I never saw your face or the way you move or where you live. That was my duty, my allyship. When I did see your face and your beard and your boxiness that sinking feeling in my stomach came and I ignored it, my prejudice. And then I found out that you were running a ring of abuse out of your house that was supposed to be a refuge, but don't worry, it's a one-time thing, just this one bad egg.

There is no pattern here. And then another, and another. It's a symptom of power, nothing to do with anything else. No commonalities.

And then I met one of you in real life, and even though we were on a double date and I was not on a date with you, you put your hands in my lap and you didn't stop when I asked and I had to work twice as hard to get half as much respect of my boundaries.

And I knew something was wrong and you looked like a wolf to me and I thought of the other ones but, you were just a bad egg, there is no pattern here, nothing to do with anyone else, no commonalities.

And then I noticed a pattern and so did a few others so we when we saw you get like this we started looking, and then I watched dozens of you fall, child porn and incest and family abuse and rape. And I listened to my friends, and I found more victims.

Wolf's clothing does not make a wolf. Now I've learned, a wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf.

me:
bisexual[1]
in an open relationship
with a man

you:
nonbinary
femme[2]
not a man

when you asked me out
i was flattered
you were poly
i was in an open relationship
so obviously i had to say yes

why not?

you were kinky
i've never done that before

[1] actually a lesbian
[2] not a lesbian

it sounded almost exciting
to be tied up
so obviously i had to say yes

why not?

when you fucked me
you complained you couldn't feel it
because of the condom
so obviously i had to say yes

why not?

you came inside me
i felt dirty and used
you used me

like a man

no not like a man
you're not a man

why not?

My name is Lauren, and I want to share my story properly.

Until starting to read up on radical feminist theory in 2018, I felt a huge disconnect from my body, and from my lesbianism, and from femaleness in general. Starting college in 2016, and being introduced into a new LGBTQ+ friendship group, I felt sort of like I belonged for the first time ever. I was insecure, didn't like my big boobs, tummy, or the long hair I'd started to rip out; so I decided to start binding and put a new label onto myself.

I'd just started using my new chosen name, and new pronouns, and it was all so very exciting! But having come out a year and a half prior, I knew this was all a facade. "Lesbian" to these people meant "bisexual, but gets crushes on people who present femininely regardless of sex".

This was the only community I knew of, so I stayed silent.

In this new group, I made friends, best friends, a(n ex) girlfriend I had to call partner, and a transgender woman, who for the purposes of this story, we'll call Wilma. Wilma briefly dated one of my best friends, and after they broke up, we all tried to stay friends, but eventually it was just Wilma and I.

Wilma and I were inseparable for a long time. I trusted Wilma with my life. I felt I could be my truest, weirdest self in front of Wilma. Sometimes, he'd scare me, or get a little too handsy, but I stayed silent. Sometimes, Wilma would get insulted if I talked about my love for women; their company, their bodies, and for a long time, wouldn't call me by my birth name when I decided I was finally comfortable with being a female. In about March of 2018, Wilma started going by a new name, new pronouns, non-binary, but to his family, still the same old Wilma.

Three months later, I went to Wilma's house for a drink and some food, and realised something I blamed myself for not realising long ago.

I want to reiterate that I trusted Wilma more than I trusted anyone, even my own parents. Wilma knew almost everything about me. The three red blotches I get on my cheek when I cry, the trauma I faced after being abandoned by half of my family, the way I drink too much, too fast to forget. And my body cannot handle alcohol. And he tried to take advantage of that.

After downing about half a bottle of a 40% alcoholic herbal liqueur, my head started to buzz. We put our favourite songs on in his kitchen. I finished up cooking and started to dance a little. Wilma started to get a little too close for comfort. I felt my hands start to sweat, but again; I stayed silent.

He started to make comments about my body, lingering glances, which unsettled me, but when Wilma tried to kiss me, I ran upstairs to sit on the toilet, still silent. I sat in there for about half an hour, calling people, pretending everything was fine, embarrassing myself, probably. Wilma sat outside the bathroom waiting for me. I suggested we go out for food, in my mind thinking, "We need to be out in a public space where I feel safer and Wilma has to compose herself,"

Herself. A womanly word, but never the actions of a female. Almost insulting, isn't it?

Wilma refused to let me leave, suggesting instead that I stay over, that we get into his bed and "cuddle". I'd heard that before; but changing the subject, I stayed silent.

I remember opening the bathroom door to go and get my things after insisting we go out "to get snacks", but the part of my brain that controls my legs failed me, and I fell face-first to the carpet. I clambered to my feet, stumbling downstairs to get my things, Wilma following behind. Silent.

The next thing I remember is trying to leave the house, pushing, Wilma significantly larger than me. He was trying to kiss me, shove me up the stairs, shove me into the kitchen, anything to get me to stay. After about five minutes of panicking and using all of my body weight and mental strength, while somehow still being as polite as I could, I managed to leave. He said goodbye, I said goodbye. I ran away down his street and called my friend, sobbing.

My mother told me I shouldn't have been drinking so much. My therapist told me it could have been worse. My close friend told me I didn't know for sure what Wilma's intentions were.

Weeks later, he showed up on my birthday with a bottle of the same herbal liqueur I'd been under the influence of when he tried to assault me.

For months now, I've been waking up sweating, shaking, crying, on one occasion with vomit in my mouth; at the very thought of confronting him. I'd tried politeness, I tried respect, I tried friendship, I tried staying quiet. It will never be enough for males, and I worry for all the young girls like me, ones with similar experiences, ones who had to stay silent, ones who didn't manage to escape, and what this new name for male entitlement and a demand for politeness is doing to them.

All I can say to those girls? Your safety is more important than any man's feelings. You are so, so worthy of a real sense of belonging. Use your rage and never ever stay fucking silent.

I've felt the need to write this and share it, for a few years. About five years ago, I moved to San Francisco. I didn't know anyone in the entire state, so I spent a lot of time and effort meeting new people, and going to social events, and accepting invitations from most everybody who invited me to anything. I met a ton of people.

When I moved out there, I didn't really know anything at all about transgender people. I was told about that idea pretty quick once I got there. I thought it was really great that people were comfortable being themselves. The idea that men who enjoyed wearing stereo typically "women's" clothes, were becoming more comfortable doing that. And the idea that men were rejecting stereotypes of men that were forced onto them from childhood, so they could be themselves without shame. And the reverse... women rejecting uncomfortable stereotypes of women so they could be happy. It was an exciting idea that if more and more people started doing this, it would become more and more obvious that none of the stereotypes about what women are like and men

are like are actually real. Sexism would be almost completely done away with!

I wish that was what happened. I was really excited to see it happen. But that isn't what happened. Something bad happened.

In San Francisco, there were a LOT of transwomen. And so while I was meeting all of those people, and doing all that socializing, I ended up meeting and becoming acquaintances with a lot of transwomen. I have written a brief description of every single transwoman who I became friends with or got to know at all. I left none out. There are nine. I have felt like this was very important for me to share.

The first transwoman I knew rubbed his penis on me when he thought I was sleeping. This was shortly after I told him I didn't return his romantic feelings for me, which I had told him many times already. That same man had previously told me that he'd spent most of his young adult life pressuring girls to have sex with him.

The second transwoman I knew, became enraged when I casually commented on sexism in commercials. I

thought what I said would be met with obvious agreement. I hadn't known many transwomen yet, and I thought that they would understand sexism and feminism a little more than men on average do. I learned that I was very wrong. I'd commented on how a string of commercials we watched featured men speaking with intelligence, confidence, and authority, and they featured women speaking in forced baby voices, sounding insecure, dumb, giggly, and weak.

This man advanced on me physically to where I was sitting, with another angry transwoman, very loud and mad, and was very upset with my comment. He said women like talking like that, and also their vocal cords physically are only able to talk like that. Then he said my comment could be compared to women who really want to wear high heels to work, but people don't let them. Which is obviously ridiculous, because that is exactly the opposite of reality... women are being forced by their workplaces to wear high heels, which most women hate and which injure feet. That is still a sexist reality in many places that women are fighting to end. He was somehow saying I was like the fantasy people who don't let these

fantasy women wear high heels to work, because of my comment.

This same man told me that he was really respected in China, which is where he was born, because he's a woman and in China women are dominant and considered superior to men. That is true, isn't it. Yes, very accurate. Not at all incorrect or literally opposite of reality.

The third transwoman I knew got upset with me at Halloween season, when I commented that women should be offered normal costumes just like men are, rather than only "sexy" versions of costumes in most places. There should be the same options for girls and boys, and women and men. He immediately disagreed and would only repeat that "Women like wearing sexy costumes!"

I repeated that girls and boys should both be offered normal costumes, and obviously if anyone, man or woman, wanted to wear a "sexy" version of a costume they should wear whatever they want. He still disagreed. He said that "women have very little opportunity to

dress femininely and sexy, and Halloween is a chance they can do it."

I explained that was the opposite of reality. Women have tons of times when they are allowed, encouraged, and pushed to dress femininely and "sexy". That includes work, after work, weekends, and... all other times I would say. I'm pretty sure he was thinking of men, for whom his comment would have been accurate.

That same man got very angry when I said women were made to feel they have to wear makeup, and that is bad. He became very angry. Not just a little. Very angry. He kept saying (angrily) "Women like wearing makeup!"

That same man told me he was a pedophile, and had to keep himself away from children.

That same man told me that "sexism is good for some women".

That same man supported Gamergate. That same man told me that the separation of women's and men's sports are not at all related to people's biological sex, and that

men who want to be called women should compete in women's sports.

That same man told me that sexism doesn't exist at all in America, and people are treated exactly the same their whole lives whether they're female or male. (I know, it contradicts his other statement that "sexism is good for some women"). I said that I had a lifetime of many many instances where I experienced sexism. From when I was very little until the present. He mockingly told me to name just one. I was so horrified that he honestly thought I would be unable to think of a single experience of sexism, and that he was mocking me about it, that I told him that it would demean me to answer to his demand of one example. It would obviously be lowering myself too far.

That same man told me that sexism in countries outside America doesn't have any effect on me.

The fourth transwoman I knew, I saw a movie with. It was good, but I noticed some very obvious sexism in the portrayal of female characters and male characters, which I later learned most everybody noticed. And while

most everybody including me agreed it was a great movie, the extreme sexism was obvious. After the movie I said so, how I loved it - but it was very sexist in these examples. And this man started insulting me and being very annoyed. He said venomously that the portrayals of female and male characters was "realistic", and then just as venomously asked me "What are you, a FEMinist?" Clearly he felt the only acceptable view of feminists is to hate them. Somehow he expected me to want to insist to him that I wasn't a feminist. Obviously I loudly said "Yeah. I am a feminist. Aren't you a feminist?"

I never saw him again. We had been casual friends for a few months, but apparently that interaction made us both lose the desire to try and meet up again.

That same man, weeks previously at a fast food joint, told me ever since he started taking estrogen that he's become extremely physically weak. He was grinning while describing to me how wonderfully weak he was, and clearly that was an idea that made him very happy. A personal fantasy. He said how now his arms are so weak, he can barely throw a frisbee! I asked him to arm wrestle

and he beat me with no effort in one second. I'd assumed that would happen.

The fifth transwoman I knew, was a very nice person. He was kind, and fun, and not a misogynist, and didn't get angry if anyone criticized anything sexist. He also didn't mind going into men's public bathrooms. I really liked him. We were friends.

The sixth transwoman I knew was over six feet tall, and had a fantasy that men would rape him. He would only ever dress in cartoonishly sexual stripper-style outfits. He described multiple times to me how he was worried that men would rape him when he walked around in public. In a voice and level of description that made it obvious this was his personal sexual fantasy. He suggested that he and I are both equally in danger from sexual assault. I'm 5'1 and just trying to live my life. He was over 6 feet and that was his sexual fantasy. We were very different in our experiences of the threat of sexual assault.

The seventh transwoman I knew, I went to the movies with and he put his hand in my crotch area. I said

"WHOA! I am not comfortable with that." And I physically took his arm and returned it to his own seat. He immediately put his arm around my neck and shoulders and said in an annoyed whiny voice "Well can I at least do this?" And I had to say no again. We barely knew each other, and were not at all romantic. I had zero romantic thought of him. He clearly didn't care or consider if I did or not. It didn't affect his feelings that he should be allowed to do things like that for his pleasure.

The eighth transwoman I knew was over six feet tall and white. He came up to me suddenly and told me that he is twice as oppressed as me, because he has sexism, as a woman, like I do, and he also has "transmisogyny". I was so shocked that he would say he experiences sexism like women that I was speechless. Obviously he was a man and so he did not. He was also gigantic.

I don't really know why he wanted to come up to me and tell me that he had "twice as much oppression as me". After he said it he just kind of looked at me waiting to see what I would say. That was the first instance I learned about the "oppression olympics". I had never

used the word "oppression" before and very rarely heard it used in person. But I was disgusted by his competitive declaration of victimhood.

Since then, of course the word "oppression" has become extremely popularly used in conversation, and that's usually a good thing, but there is definitely this unsavory world of people like him who build their identities around having the "most" oppression, like an impressive commodity, who have no basis in reality.

That same man, after my lack of response, then told me that he also doesn't have white privilege because he grew up poor.

That same man told me that he'd spent much of his life pressuring women to have sex with him.

The ninth transwoman I knew, told me he would only ever date women who shave their bodies. I know that men have no idea the level of pain and insecurity that teenage girls go through because of the forced shaving culture, so I gave him a break and replied with a kind of friendly comment that even though shaving their bodies for women is an extremely torturous social norm,

everyone has preferences about their romantic partners and that's fine. Though I felt like that particular preference is specifically a preference for women suffering an unhealthy lifelong ritual born completely out of insecurity.

I figured I'd just write this guy off, and there was no point in saying so. But I couldn't help poking the misogynist bear a little. He was trying to get me to hang out with him. So I asked if he just won't have a relationship with a woman who doesn't shave her body, or if he can't even stand to see them at all in any setting. Because it was summer and I love going to the beach in shorts, and I needed to know if I shouldn't invite him to to beach. I actually thought I was being funny and that he would know that, but he answered seriously that he "would feel grossed out if he looked at me." Imagine one person feeling comfortable telling someone that they would feel grossed out to look at you. That man sure felt comfortable saying it to me.

I have also known some transmen. They are usually very kind, thoughtful people. I have known some very closely for years before they decided to be transition. Most of

them, years after that decision, still fight internally against the feeling that they have to conform to femininity or they are inherently ugly and worthless. Most of them still mentally fight to nurture any sense of self-confidence to speak their opinions, or take up space in a group as a full person, who deserves as much free immediate respect as any other.

Those are things that women experience.

Almost all transwomen are now saying that they are not men breaking social expectations, that they are women. That they are women because women are sexist stereotypes.

Men breaking social expectations would deserve respect and props for being themselves despite social pressure. That would be a cool move. But they are instead insulting women, supporting sexist stereotypes religiously, closing down women's shelters, women's rape trauma centers, and women's festivals. They are taking women's government positions, women's scholarships, and women's awards.

I'm pretty sure most people know that women are not allowed to talk about this. We are not allowed to speak our discomfort. If a woman says she is uncomfortable with any of that, trans rights activists bombard her with online harassment, sometimes even rape threats, very descriptive rape threats involving their own penises. They also do this to any lesbian who says lesbians don't want to have sex with penises. Any woman who is a feminist. Any woman who wouldn't even call herself a feminist because that word takes a lot of courage to use, but who still speaks of helping women and ending sexist beliefs, or describes reality without pandering to make these men feel good.

I used to think the transgender social movement would bring us all leaps and bounds into a brighter future, but I really think it has dragged us all back far in time and rolled back women's rights and safety and respect many decades into the past. I used to think all those violent woman-hating transwomen were just the rare bad apple, and most are good people who don't want to hurt women. But that list of transwomen that I described is every single one I've known in person. 8 out of 9 were

examples of the most misogynist of men. My experiences have made me wary now, and I can barely even picture in my imagination a transwoman saying the words "It's impossible to feel like a woman", or "Women deserve to be allowed to get together and talk about women's issues".

The misogynist pejorative TERF means: Dyke. Feminazi. Cunt. They all know this.

It pains me to see women being caught up in this social movement, clearly just trying to be polite and "politically correct", or seeking male approval. Most of them are insecure. I understand. But I wish they would speak up and be honest about the truth, and not just do whatever these men tell them they must do and say to avoid being called a TERF.

You didn't tell me you were different. You told me I was different.

"You're so special. You're the only one who understands me. The only one who likes me. The only one I can count on. No one loves me but you. I need you. Please don't leave. I can't do it without you."

I was fifteen, and I wasn't the only one.

Friends was never good enough. A twenty year old man never wants to be friends with a fifteen year old girl. A twenty year old man wants a girl. A little girl. A good girl. A special girl.

He wants your loyalty, your trust, your heart. He'll leave a relationship for you. Travel to a different city to see you.

And he'll want to be like you. "I never want kids," you tell him. He asks for your uterus. He asks for your body. He tells you he doesn't ever want sex but he wants you. You're different. You're special.

He's not different. He's not special. He's not the only one.

You're a child, and he ask you about your body. He'll tell you he's jealous, and it isn't his fault. He's like you.

He isn't like you.

He shows you how he's trying so hard to be like you. You video chat and he shows you his breast inserts. You never asked for this. You only wanted a friend.

You thought he would be different.

You're lucky, aren't you? A lucky girl who never had to try. When other grown men cat call and grope you're a lucky girl. He wishes he could have that.

You'd give it to him if you could. Maybe then he won't ask for more.

Your friends know it isn't okay. You know it isn't okay. You know yourself. You can trust yourself.

You tell him you thought he would be different. He's not. You're guilty. You're wrong.

He's wrong. He isn't lonely. He doesn't need you. You do not need him.

You do not need him.

He was never different.

I'm already enough.

the decrees were:

this is a woman's face. it doesn't matter if you see it twisted in the rage of a man with the sound of a father coming from behind the stubbled cheeks below the woman's eyes that are saying that she wants to make a hole in you and fuck it til you die.

this is a woman's body. focus on the expanse between the frightening stretched out prepubescents' breasts on the six foot frame and the pubis mound that at intervals you have "volunteered" to "help her" by applying poison, waiting, then slickly wiping the dying wormish strands away while she watches you with the satisfaction of a shark.

these are a woman's actions. when she does all the things you hate it when men do bite the inside of your lips until they bleed because it's important that you love them now because haven't you always said it's different when a woman does it and she needs to be a woman.

this is a woman's penis. say the right words and make her feel like it's a clitoris. put your money where your mouth is. put your mouth where your mouth is, never knowing that when you hear the word "mouthfeel" years later you will wish you had a gag reflex or that anything

would happen except this spinning loss of sensation, an abrupt blankness.

this is lesbian sex. don't be clinical even after she showed you the charts in that zine that everyone loved and taught you how to think of it. don't bother asking if you can stop because you're tired because dykes love marathons in the bedroom. this is eating her out. this is a vulva, not a velveteen penis that makes you want to die and that she said she was too dysphoric to use anyway.

believe. good. not good enough. now act on the belief.

obey.

decree (n.)

"special ordinance or regulation promulgated by authority," early 14c., originally ecclesiastical, secular use is by late 14c., from Old French decre, variant of decret (12c., Modern French décret), from Latin decretum, neuter of decretus, past participle of decernere "to decree, decide, pronounce a decision," from de (see de-) + cernere "to separate" (from PIE root *krei- "to sieve," thus "discriminate, distinguish").

Devin and I were introduced by another coworker when he got hired. The other coworker gestured to me, "college student," and then to him, "college student," before pausing suggestively.

He seemed like every other new hire, generic community college boy.

As time passed, the people at work made fun of Devin because of his multicolored, unbrushed teeth and under-washed clothes and body.

But I gave Devin the benefit of the doubt, felt like he maybe just needed a friend. He seemed nice enough and referenced SpongeBob at all the right moments.

People always misread my warmth in friendships as flirtatious.

Erika met her husband at our workplace. She was taken by the idea of puppy love between me and Devin and tried to encourage me, to make me understand that this boy was just smitten with me. Even my autism-blunted social perception didn't obscure her constant nudges.

I don't date, I always said, and I'm not interested— we're just friends. She looked at me like she expected I would

change my mind. Devin is in the Denny's foyer playing a crane machine and can't hear us.

I retreat to the ladies' room to purge and grumpily wish I had the peanut butter pancakes but couldn't because another work friend, Bec, is deadly-allergic and can't even be at a table with peanut anything.

Devin smiles broadly when he returns with a little teddy bear in a baseball uniform he presents to me. Erika pushes me to keep it but I gift it to her because she likes sports.

No one at work knows much about my romantic life. An older man consumed my teen years, chewed me alive while I hid from myself. I expect he might always own me.

No one really knows I know I'm not straight. I'm not sure how not-straight but I am too busy with school, with the older man, with starving and puking myself to near-death. I expect to die before I need to fall in love.

I never expect to accept a kiss from a coworker, and despite everyone rooting for Devin, it's Becca. She had no idea how I would react, but our connection cemented us a breath apart from one another.

Devin came out as trans to Becca first while he begged for advice on getting me to date him.

"What if she's completely straight?" he worried.

I imagine Becca smirking at the question, because she hadn't known for sure either.

Devin came out to me soon afterward.

I knew Devin identified as a furry and had a fursona. I didn't know that the fursona was a buxom fox named Foxxxy and that Foxxxy was his preferred name.

We all discuss what Devin's coming out might mean in the context of the friendship. He says we can privately use she/her pronouns but he wasn't out and couldn't be until his living situation changed.

I had trans friends before. I was versed in LGBT topics. I wholeheartedly (naively) believed that no one would ever leverage and exploit trans identity for personal or sexual gain.

Soon after, Devin hopefully asks, "Can you help me pick a Halloween costume?"

I hoped that agreeing to help would make our connection less focused on an unrequited crush. Maybe even sisterly.

We drove together to a 24 Hour Walmart and explored the Halloween aisles until Devin settled on a goth fairy dress. I drop binge food into a carriage, planning a

bulimic conclusion to my evening, when I think Devin has finished collecting costume parts. I start to corral him to the self checkouts, but he stops.

"Wait... We're forgetting something."

"What?"

Awkwardly, shyly even, Devin says, "a bra?"

"Oh," I say. I think of every story I've ever read about supportive allyship, friendship, for trans people and lead Devin to lingerie as I explain how bras are measured. We have to estimate both cup and band sizes; we don't know his chest measurement, and Devin doesn't have breasts.

He doesn't say a word on Halloween among our friends, and when we worry that he's upset and check on him, he texts me that he didn't want to speak because of the pitch of his voice.

"I don't want to break the illusion."

It doesn't bother me, doesn't even seem notable, when Devin starts to wear black leggings on our outings.

But discomfort creeps back to the center stage of our relationship when I can't ignore that Devin's romantic feelings for me are probably stronger than ever, but now

he feels a special kind of entitlement to the time Bec and I spend alone together.

Just wants to be included in "girl stuff."

I ask what he thinks we do. None of the usual stereotypes apply. Neither of us wears makeup, neither of us is overly fashionable, neither of us is especially conventionally feminine in the ways he seems to believe we are when no men disturb us.

I reject requests for sleepovers alone with him and his father.

He asks us directly about a particular evening that we had a "tickle fight," which was actually Bec tickling me while I was already upset and me swatting at her in frustration.

Still, he goes overboard at Christmas and buys me an obscene quantity of Harry Potter merch that I never enjoy because I feel so uncomfortable accepting them from him. My face burns red when my manager does my evening bag check and sees the excess from the college student who wouldn't stop trying to woo me.

Another friend tells me on New Year's Eve that Erika wants me and Devin to have a New Year's kiss.

Bec and I are both out of our element, because neither of us drinks, neither of us parties, neither of us is

especially comfortable in a bar. There aren't enough chairs at the table, so Bec and I share a barstool.

After midnight, Devin buys peanut butter and jelly shots and promptly spills them on the table. Bec and I go outside to make sure she doesn't suffer an allergic reaction.

At the end of the night, a friend notes that Devin and I didn't kiss. I think of his oral hygiene. Erika rolls her eyes at me and bitterly grumbles, "Well, if you weren't sitting in Bec's lap all night..."

After that night, I try to make Devin understand how unwilling to be in a relationship with him I was over and over again, but it escalates through Valentine's Day when he brings me candy and a stuffed fox holding a heart shaped pillow that says FOXY. I purged the candy and donated the toy fox.

My manager notices my clear embarrassment and asks if I want her to talk to him about the romantic gestures. I feel bad for him and tell her I'll be okay.

Soon after, though, other friends found out about my relationship with Becca, and it made it back to Devin.

"I saw her first."

Months of anger came out in my declaration that he does not lay claim to me like calling shotgun in a car.

That my decision was final and that my decision was mine alone. Neither he nor Bec nor any other person could decide my romantic future for me based on any arbitrary factors.

I don't want to talk about his behavior at work after that conversation. I blocked him on social media and moved on with my life. I prepared myself to be professional at work but stonewall him socially. But then Bec's allergic reactions started. Knowing she had a deadly allergy, he chose to rub peanut butter on common surfaces.

And eventually, he and another coworker tried to frame me as a negligent bimbo, a lazy employee sleeping with management, which ultimately didn't work out. It's not as scintillating as it sounds.

Even more frustratingly, maybe, is that, afterward, I continually learned new details about the obsessive behavior and disrespectful nature of his attachment to me.

His father told him not to give up on me; I was pretending to like "the other girl" for his attention. Devin agreed, somehow homophobic while begging for respect as a woman.

He cried hysterically at work when he saw me on a dating site.

After Devin is laid off, he never stops coming back.

One night, a manager approaches me to ask why Devin, visiting to buy a purse, is dressed like Rainbow Brite.

Another time, he brings carriages into the store and pretends to have forgotten that he didn't currently work with us.

He talks to me and Bec like nothing ever happened, updates us on his improving life.

I went to Emma's office hours, because I wanted to talk to a generally compassionate, intelligent woman who taught a class centered on intersectional oppression. I hoped to understand how much nuance was reasonable in dealing with abuse perpetrated by a trans abuser.

I care about the wellbeing of trans people, and I recognize most trans people are just living their lives and hoping to do so safely.

But I can't ignore the very typical "nice guy" boundary pushing behavior Devin exhibited. Devin also presented, identified, acted like a man during the majority of that event; his trans status at the time was little more than dress up and expecting lessons about womanhood while refusing to treat me with the same compassion he so readily absorbed.

In fact, I didn't keep up with Devin after I blocked him, so I can't answer Emma when she tries to ask me "this person's" current name and pronouns, because I don't know. She emphasizes that she wouldn't want to misgender anyone.

I'm floored by the feeling that she's coddling the feelings of someone who sexually harassed me for two years and tried to passively murder my now-fiancée. She is tone-policing and derailing my already more-polite-than-Devin-deserves account of what happened. Downplayed the event— either it wasn't that bad and I'm a transphobe overreacting to nothing or it was that bad and I'm a transphobe for not unconditionally accepting an abuser's feelings about gender.

Almost two years of harassment don't matter as much as a stranger, who was barely more than a hypothetical, being referred to by current name and pronouns. I didn't keep up with Devin and didn't know at the time whether he ever decided to socially transition or to pick a name that didn't contain a pornographic triple-X.

Devin looks creepily similar to me now. I don't know Devin's current name. Devin is a concrete figure in my memory. A chapter I closed. I don't want to reopen it to appear more respectful of a person I resent. I don't know who Devin is now, and I don't want to be introduced.

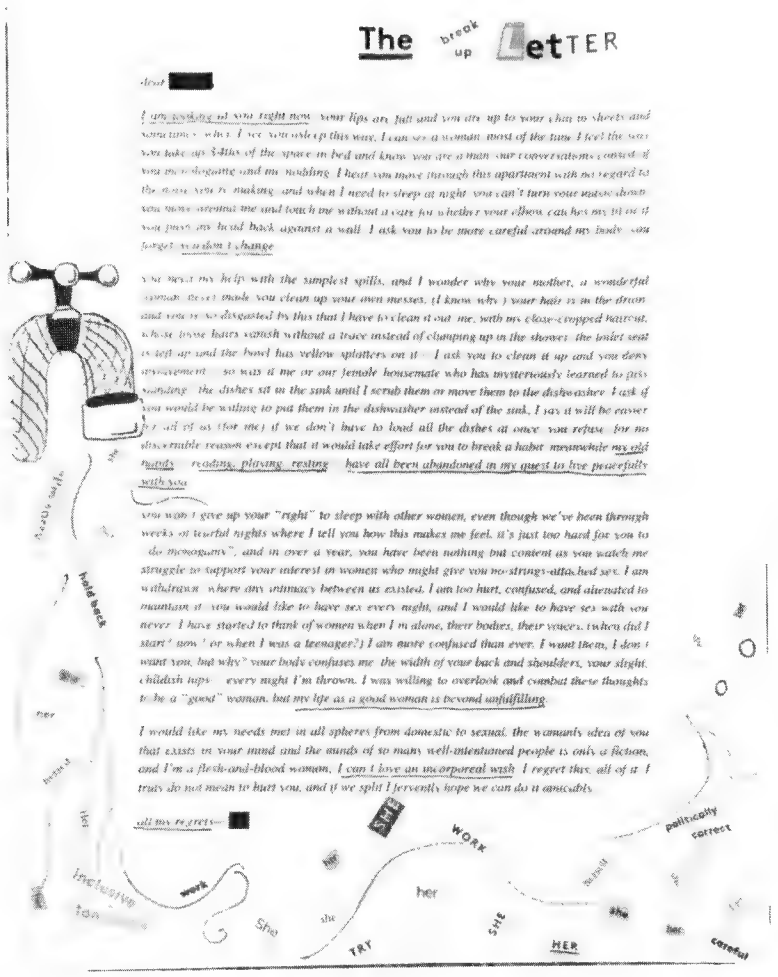
you told us we were so, so lucky
lucky to have endometriosis,
because at least we had a uterus
lucky to have ovarian cysts,
because at least we had ovaries
lucky to be abused,
because at least we were abusable

how much of us did you want?
how much of our existence was a torment to you?
how much more did it hurt when we finally left you?

were you lonely, or just missing something
you thought you got to own?

you begged us to say you were beautiful,
begged us to hear your voice
as indistinguishable from our own,
begged us to see the violent outbursts
and holes in your walls
as nothing but female

our senses have returned


The break up LetTER
dear
I am looking at you right now. your lips are full and you are up to your chin in sheets and sometimes, when I see you asleep this way, I can see a woman. most of the time I feel the way you take up 3/4ths of the space in bed and know you are a man. our conversations consist of you monologuing and me nodding. I hear you move through this apartment with no regard to the noise you're making, and when I need to sleep at night, you can't turn your music down. you move around me and touch me without a care for whether your elbow catches my tit or if you push my head back against a wall. I ask you to be more careful around my body, you forget, you don't change.
you need my help with the simplest spills, and I wonder why your mother, a wonderful woman, never made you clean up your own messes. (I know why.) your hair is in the drain, and you're so disgusted by this that I have to clean it out. me, with my close-cropped haircut, whose loose hairs vanish without a trace instead of clumping up in the shower. the toilet seat is left up and the bowl has yellow splatters on it-- I ask you to clean it up and you deny involvement-- so was it me or our female housemate who has mysteriously learned to piss standing? the dishes sit in the sink until I scrub them or move them to the dishwasher. I ask if you would be willing to put them in the dishwasher instead of the sink. I say it will be easier for all of us (for me) if we don't have to load the dishes all at once. you refuse, for no discernible reason except that it would take effort for you to break a habit. meanwhile my old habits-- reading, playing, resting-- have all been abandoned in my quest to live peacefully with you.
you won't give up your "right" to sleep with other women, even though we've been through weeks of tearful nights where I tell you how this makes me feel. it's just too hard for you to "do monogamy", and in over a year, you have been nothing but content as you watch me struggle to support your interest in women who might give you no-strings-attached sex. I am withdrawn where any intimacy between us existed. I am too hurt, confused, and alienated to maintain it. you would like to have sex every night, and I would like to have sex with you never. I have started to think of women when I'm alone, their bodies, their voices. (when did I start? uni? or when I was a teenager?) I am more confused than ever. I want them, I don't want you, but why? your body confuses me: the width of your back and shoulders, your slight, childish hips-- every night I'm thrown. I was willing to overlook and combat these thoughts to be a "good" woman, but my life as a good woman is beyond unfulfilling.
I would like my needs met in all spheres from domestic to sexual. the womanly idea of you that exists in your mind and the minds of so many well-intentioned people is only a fiction, and I'm a flesh-and-blood woman. I can't love an incorporeal wish. I regret this, all of it. I truly do not mean to hurt you, and if we split I fervently hope we can do it amicably.
all my regrets—
SHE
WORK
politically correct
inclusive
work
her
She
TRY
SHE
HER
careful

The Break Up Letter by Anonymous

dear redacted,

I am looking at you right now. your lips are full and you are up to your chin in sheets and sometimes, when I see

you asleep this way, I can see a woman. most of the time I feel the way you take up 3/4ths of the space in bed and know you are a man. our conversations consist of you monologuing and me nodding. I hear you move through this apartment with no regard to the noise you're making, and when I need to sleep at night, you can't turn your music down. you move around me and touch me without a care for whether your elbow catches my tit or if you push my head back against a wall. I ask you to be more careful around my body, you forget, you don't change.

you need my help with the simplest spills, and I wonder why your mother, a wonderful woman, never made you clean up your own messes. (I know why.) your hair is in the drain, and you're so disgusted by this that I have to clean it out. me, with my close-cropped haircut, whose loose hairs vanish without a trace instead of clumping up in the shower. the toilet seat is left up and the bowl has yellow splatters on it-- I ask you to clean it up and you deny involvement-- so was it me or our female housemate who has mysteriously learned to piss standing? the dishes sit in the sink until I scrub them or move them to the dishwasher. I ask if you would be willing to put them in the dishwasher instead of the sink. I say it will be easier for all of us (for me) if we don't have to load the dishes all at once. you refuse, for no discernible reason except that it would take effort for you to break a habit. meanwhile my old habits-- reading,

When night fell, we went into your room and you opened your laptop and took some funny pictures of yourself and some of us together. I remember watching Youtube videos and listening to music and scrolling through Tumblr. You posted on your blog about how we were hanging out, you made little inside jokes about us. For a moment, I felt proud to know you and I was flattered that you thought I was significant enough to share with your thousands of followers. But again, I was in a very low place. You knew that.

I said I was tired, so we got into bed. You were on your back and I was on my back. I remember your chest rattling as you were breathing, like you had phlegm inside that you needed to cough up. You started coughing and I could hear the phlegm in the back of your throat. I turned onto my side. Then you turned onto your side. Your face wasn't too close to the back of my neck, not yet, but I knew you had moved closer because I could feel your body heat now. You whispered my name and asked me a question that I pretended not to hear. I steadied my breathing and acted like I was asleep. Your breath was still rattling. I heard you snort the phlegm into your mouth. Then I heard you swallow it. I thought I was going to throw up. After that, you went quiet and I thought you fell asleep. I started to relax but then you said my name again. I said nothing.

You said my name once more and then you asked:

"Can we cuddle? I'm stimming really bad."

My stomach lurched, my throat clenched and I wanted to cry. I told you, "no, that's not something I'm comfortable with right now."

I apologized to you. I said I was sorry. You said it was okay.

Then you were quiet, I was quiet, and your room was quiet. The streets outside were quiet. I heard the faint chime of crickets chirping. The darkness from your open closet bled into the white walls around it and, like ink in water, a slow and creeping black cloud made its way toward me. I closed my eyes. I exhaled and started drifting off to sleep.

And then you whimpered.

I opened my eyes but said nothing. You started to squirm and I said nothing, just tried to keep very still and breathe slowly and quietly. You let out a small moan. I felt your weight shift behind me. You were closer now, too close, with your knees touching the backs of my mine. I immediately curled my legs up to avoid your touch. You said sorry. I said nothing.

You told me that the stimming was just really bad and that you needed to cuddle something. You reached for a large stuffed toy and you wrapped your arms and legs

around it. I felt the way you were "stimming" against it behind me. You whimpered again. I stared unblinking into the darkness of your closet and listened to you until you fell asleep.

I don't know what time it was when I got out of your bed and searched your bedroom floor for my belongings. It wasn't light out and the buses weren't running yet. I crept silently to the bathroom and locked the door and cried. I put on the same clothes I was wearing the night before and left. I walked for a long time not even knowing what direction I was going. I was unfamiliar with the neighborhood you lived in. I walked until the sun started to rise. I was supposed to go to work. I called and left a message, saying I couldn't make it in. Eventually I made it back home, to the person and place I was seeking refuge from in the first place. I was in a very low place, and you knew that.

You didn't ask me if I was okay. We didn't see each other for a while after that. When we did see each other, I acted like I was okay. We saw each other whenever you were in town. We had all the same friends, and all those friends adored you and fawned over you, so it would have been stupid of me to suggest you were anything but pristine. I did still care about you, despite it all. I just tried to put the sound of you whimpering in the dark out of my mind because I wanted to keep you as a friend. Still, I always felt like you wanted something else from

me and I never felt safe when we were alone together. I kept this to myself.

It has been about six years and I've only told a handful of people. I don't think about it very often, but I always remember it vividly when I see your face, when I read what you post on social media, when I hear someone cough up a mouthful of phlegm. I was in a very low place, and you knew that. You said you wanted me to be safe, but I think you wanted something else.

i just wanted to reiterate that i'm still here. not the lie-woman you've constructed in your story but the woman who lived with you. the woman who slowly gave up everything for you: my sexuality, my sex (read: gender), my personal time, my ability to access reality, my health, my bodily integrity. these things i gave to you, not always willingly, but in a way that's enough like it that i reflexively blame myself entirely. but not just the woman who gave up those things for you but the woman who you took from. you took my life for your novel, then for your art and porn. you took my words for your own, so often, saying, tell me what to say. you took my trauma for your own, lying, watched and then mimicked. you took my sexual boundaries one by one. you took my right to a life without injury and put a fist through it. but not just the woman who gave to you and you took from, but the woman you "loved" and that "loved" you back. who held you when you cried after you attacked her. who tried to keep you alive. who you said was the last light you could have ever imagined in the long, dark harbor of your life, long after you'd given up hope. who responded (as programmed) to your naked emotional need. teach me to be a woman. teach me to be a person. i watch what you say now, layered incredulity | understanding | acceptance | horror. you were always a liar but i always believed you, forgave you. even to the end i believed you and forgave you. i was leaving so you

could heal yourself and do better and we could be together again. even then i believed you, not just believed you but believed in you. nobody knows but me and you what went on in that apartment. but i know and you know. i wish i hadn't given everything i had to combat the main truth you tell, that you are a void, that you are heartless, that you are dangerous and unfixable. these things are true. i see a thirty one year old white man who calls himself a nonbinary latina trans girl and thinks posting on social media about "slapping your sister in the face with your dick" is a genuine act of political revolution. who is openly in favor of incest. who has dropped the facade of morality, who says, yes, i want children to fuck each other, it gets me hard, i want to fuck children, it makes me erect. i know there is bestiality on your hard drive. so much drawn child porn, probably real child porn. when i called and your new girlfriend picked up she sounded so fucking young. moving on, i think the worst part about it is being destroyed so completely by someone so truly embarrassing. the way you are is embarrassing, it is humiliating, if i saw you in a public library, i would think, oh my god, who is that hideous, dangerous autogynephile internet-socialized man. i would never be friends with you. i would never even be your acquaintance. i would not spend four years as your 24/7, always on-call, mother | sex toy | servant | therapist. i would not lie still on the bed, on my face, sprend eagled, while you snort and huff and touch my genitals with one

hand for what could be hours but it's only minutes, a piece of meat to aid your imagination of having a vulva instead of a penis. i would not allow you to tell me it's okay that you hit, choke, scratch and bite me because i tell you how fucked up you are for hitting, choking, scratching and biting me. i would not play your games and i would not fall for your tricks. and i just want you to know wherever you show yourself, i will always find you. i know this feeds your persecution complex but that is as stupid as you are. you are not in danger. you are not being harmed because someone who has had to rebuild her entire life from your ruination keeps a tab on where you're posting about your desire to fuck children, animals, dead bodies, disembodied parts of bodies, and dying people you've mortally wounded. you are not being oppressed because i have a compulsion to track your lies. this is the written equivalent of when i would reach my breaking point and start to hysterically sob and speak without any breaks, the litany. this happened the other night in my current life, i was upset, i felt wronged, and it started up. i mechanically did dishes while sobbing and ranting, saying the same thing over and over, saying different things, moving from topic to topic like a kaleidoscope. when i ran myself down my wife came to me and wrapped herself around me and kissed my forehead, and said, i was listening, it seemed like you needed to talk. when i started you would come for me, put me down, hurt me bad, soft spots, places you knew were already aching, places that wouldn't leave

marks. i stopped lying but you went further in. that's why nothing can help you. you live nothing truthfully. you know the sympathy you get is false, for a false history peppered with others true pains. i know what really happened to you. and it's deeply sad that a little boy choked and tried to drown you when you were a little boy, and he called you a faggot, and it hurt all over and you cried. but that doesn't give you the right to take my life, to take others lives, to get off to them, to twist them into your meaningless stories for meaningless validation that will not keep you warm on your deathbed. i'm sorry he tried to drown you. are you sorry anything happened to me? are you sorry for what you did to me? why has every woman anywhere near you had to pay for that boy's attack on you for your entire life? your mother is scared of you. your half-sister is scared of you. your rape-loving brother adores you to pieces. anyone unblinded by ideology sees you as a threat, because you are, you are not small, you are not harmless, you are a tall, large, frightening man who wears women's clothing as clear as the temper on your face.

Aiden by Anonymous

Aiden[1] was in his twenties--small, maybe 5'4", with a slight build. We worked together at a women-owned co-op, one of the cool places to work for hipster dykes and trans guys in that city. All of Aiden's friends were butch dykes. Everyone I knew assumed he was a transman.

I was in early detransition from being a transman myself, and trying hard to be femme to compensate. Swinging wildly in a different direction but still very much caught in the "gender" mind--everyone had to have a strong sense of gender; it had to be your primary focus and it determined the shape of your social life.

Another trans guy I worked with, Noah, would sometimes make fun of Aiden by holding a blank piece of paper in front of his face and saying "Look at me, I'm Aiden." I'd laugh along. Noah and I were Jews, while Aiden was white, pale-eyed and very blonde--he would have been very aryan nation-looking if not for his delicate build and longish hair that added to his

[1] Names have been changed solely to protect my own privacy. I called this abuser "Aiden" because other predatory transwomen who pose as transmen to deceive lesbians call this practice "Aidening." This term is intended to mock the fact that many transmen change their names to Aiden. I am not participating in this mocking of transmen; I want to call attention to the fact that this practice of transwomen posing as transmen is a named and acknowledged phenomenon among predators who like to brag about such things.

"prettiness." I knew it was mean-spirited but I also saw in it Noah's jealous insecurity. Noah, who was also on the small side, passed well enough--but didn't want to be a trans man or read as queer in any way. Noah wanted to blend into straight society entirely and saw Aiden as more capable of that, not being marked as any other kind of sexually suspect "other." Noah was deeply not okay, I knew. Noah's hobby was photoshopping childhood photos to create evidence of a boyhood that never happened. So I laughed along, but secretly felt a little protective of Aiden.

We never worked together, so by the time I was leaving that job we'd still never had a real conversation. But the last day I went in, just to wrap up some final things, he was there. He caught me just as I was leaving for the last time. I was almost out the door when he asked if I'd like to hang out sometime. I thought to myself that he probably liked me, and while I didn't feel the same, didn't feel any pull at all, he seemed harmless enough. I thought that I should make it a point to try and see the humanity of this person I'd mocked as being a blank piece of paper. So I said sure. I thought maybe we could be friends.

I was in my early twenties then, and hadn't yet found my way to the rooms of women, other incest survivors, with whom I would forge an understanding of how deeply I had been compromised by that early abuse. I didn't yet know that I could be a person who wants or doesn't

want, not a thing to be acted upon by others. I didn't yet know how to say no. I was in a dwindling relationship with another woman who was into SM, who acted as my "dominant." Within that framework, I was never going to find my way to embodying and enacting my own will. In many ways, I was deeply unable to do that, but about being intimate exclusively with women, I was completely solid. It was one of the only things I knew how to say no about--and ever since deciding to live as a "femme" I'd had countless opportunities to reject men's attention. I took pride in that. Yet I had much less ability to draw a line with other women. I almost knew, at the time, that this was a saving grace--that if I'd been with men, the situation of a woman like me would be immeasurably worse.

And things were already not well. For reasons related to my disidentification from my sex (I thought of myself as "femme but not a woman"), my then-partner had decided that while I was femme enough I was not sufficiently female. She decided we needed an open relationship because she missed having sex with a "real" woman. She did start seeing someone else for that purpose.

So when Aiden called, I decided that I would go hang out. We talked and walked around, as I recall, ending up near where he lived. When he predictably made a move later on, in his room, I tried to reject it as gently as possible. He was unfazed by this, which was unfamiliar

to me and so unrelatable I couldn't parse it: like every other dyke or trans guy I knew, even the whiff of rejection was enough to repel me.

I thought that Aiden must just not understand. And then I felt sort of bad for him. And then I thought, well, I could go along a little bit and just not let things get too far. It would be okay. Even if I wasn't into it, it would just be a little more experience. What would the harm be, really? I think I was slowly realizing that I couldn't actually stop what was happening, and deciding to make it my own idea. This was not such a stretch for me then, believing, as I did, that I existed to be used. So I was going along. But then things shifted so I could not help but know that Aiden was not a transman at all.

I felt very cold. I couldn't move, feel or think clearly. I wasn't anywhere. I know I was filled with NO and somehow--I don't remember how--it stopped.

If at that moment I could have held onto what I knew--that a male is a male--I believe I could have gotten out then. But Aiden had a story to tell me, and I listened.

First he said all the right things to be reassuring. He may have apologized. Then he said he was delighted that I had thought he was female, and confided that actually, he had come to this city to transition to being a woman. He asked if I'd read Sarah by JT Leroy (which at the time, no one knew was actually written by a woman) and said

it was the closest representation to his own life he'd ever found. It's a wild piece of fiction about a little boy whose mother feminizes him to prostitute at a truck stop. Aiden said he was a prostitute too.

He said he had been surprised to find himself not transitioning to womanhood--that he'd expected and planned for that future. But now he was trying to learn to be a man. His new plan was to be socialized by butches because he felt they could teach him to be a man. He said that he'd never actually be a man but wanted to try living as one at least for now and see how it went. He said that, in a way, he was a transman--having had a confused childhood, earnestly moving toward being the woman he felt he was, and only now, as an adult, for the first time attempting to be a man. He said he needed help to make this happen. Help that could really only come from others with complicated histories of gender, like mine. He presented his situation as complementary to mine, and in a way as the same, equated because we had both moved through such different gender identities.

And this was such a shock, such a bending of my expectations, that whatever defenses I had were impaired.

In our queer world, bodies were not supposed to matter in terms of gender. There was more algebra to do than what came naturally to me as a lesbian response. My

lesbian response to Aiden was simple: disinterest from a distance, then repulsion from close proximity. My queer training taught me to distrust and counteract that lesbian response, because it meant I was not taking transgender identities seriously, not respecting their complexity, not believing in the power of the trans person's spirit over the realm of matter, not honoring the ability to transform. It meant seeing ourselves as doomed to biological destinies not really meant for us. It would mean admitting defeat.

Within this logic, if I admitted that Aiden's body repulsed me, then I also had to admit to my girlfriend, who was very invested in straddling the line between being a stone butch and a transman, that I didn't really experience her as being male during sex--that if I did experience her that way, I would not be with her. It would mean taking apart so many of the lies we built our lives on--lies meant to soothe each other's feelings, lies meant to take away the sting of our powerlessness. That any girl who wanted to could grow up to be male, or any man could become female by the power of his will. That someone who wanted to transition to be a woman had never really been a boy at all. Living in these lies, practicing their repetition, made me unable to think and perceive with clarity.

I didn't have a defense against Aiden's lies. He was a predator who used them with skill. I believe he knew how to identify and target a woman who had been

groomed by previous abuse. I believe he intentionally passed as a transman by putting himself--his unusual build, his deceptively "gentle" demeanor--into clothes and a context where they would be read a certain way. It was his way of "presenting as female." I believe he walked among lesbians and transmen to hone and perfect this passing. I believe he took special pleasure in acting out his sadistic abuse on lesbians in particular--women he would otherwise have had no access to, women who would have rejected him if they knew the truth to begin with. Violation was really the point for him. The deception thrilled him. The moment of revelation excited him, and he liked the challenge of manipulating an unwilling woman into more. He didn't want to rape by brute force. He wanted to break minds.

If he said he was a transwoman, really a woman inside, then rejecting him would be wrong--the ethic of our scene dictated that I should be willing to offer myself to such an underdog.

Women living as femmes, in particular, were understood as consolation prizes for those with "oppressed queer masculinities" and Aiden's "transwoman-trying-to-be-a-man" story fit him into that category.

And if he said he was actually kind of a transman, then what was my problem? I'd been with other transmen before.

He said he didn't know how to be a man. He said he'd been a prostitute like Sarah from the book. He said SM roleplay could help with learning how to be a man. He wanted to start by playing a different kind of prostitute. He wanted to role play being rough trade picked up a yuppie woman, and then--ostensibly as a class rage catharsis--he'd brutalize her. After he gave a very convincing performance as a brutal man doling out a sexualized beating, he said he was going to go meet a john, casually mentioned some very dangerous warning signs about the situation, and asked for a safety call. I don't believe, anymore, that he ever went to see a john. I think he said this so I wouldn't perceive him as an aggressor, only a potential victim--so I wouldn't understand what had just happened to me. It was meant to make me understand the real beating I'd experienced as pretend, while I was meant to see him as being in actual danger from a scary man.

He was the scary man.

I don't know what class rage he really could have had, since he'd talked about his father's STEM career, and his time spent traveling in India (after which he appropriated an Indian surname). For all of his offensive affectations of "white trash" speech, he did not seem to come from poverty. Looking back, I see the scene he created as more about adding an anti-Semitic flavor to the misogyny than anything else. But I believe he liked to "wear" many different oppressed identities as leverage

to exploit and manipulate women. A blank piece of paper can do that.

His lies and strategies for confusion were extremely dangerous to me. I cannot imagine any other situation in which I would have been coerced into enough proximity to him that I would have been at risk for his violence. I count myself lucky that this was a fleeting experience. I know other women who were ensnared and trapped by men like this.

i. mine

knowing you is knowing life. it's less romantic than it sounds. ancient knowledge of survival. the gift of fear. a bite from an apple. a thousand little deaths so my lungs can draw a breath. sometimes i wish i didn't know that i know. you want my skin, to wear me (out). to expel and become. so commonplace: possession is a female state. haven't you ever seen a movie? so physical. irony, then: you could not see through my eyes, no, not even if you put them in your skull. but another reversal: it comes easy to me. it's like you've given me a map, but you didn't have to. i've been memorizing it for a long time.

ii. yours

the depth of my pain is something you cannot comprehend. things are so simple for you. you don't know what it's like. without me, you can connect and people will help you. this must not happen. the weight of my nothing must lie heavy on your shoulders. hold still. i want to consume you. it's the least you can do.

iii. mine

repetition. repetition. repetition. i believe. i believe. i believe.

iv. yours

do this for me, but you must never let me know it's for me. it's not a chore, baby, you just have to do it, do you know how much it hurts me when you don't do it? oh, you look so tired, and i'm bitter, you bitch. sew yourself tighter and tell me how much you love the squeeze. deny the needle i placed in your hand. what needle? convince me it's natural. convince yourself first. i don't want to see the seams.

iv.

i'm going to kill you.

It began when I was just-newly-eighteen, grey skin and underweight from a serious eating disorder, and languishing in an unhappy relationship with a man. I had been questioning my sexuality for around four years by that point.

Enter the transwoman. I'd known him since we were about fourteen, and he knew I preferred girls. It turns out that he preferred me, and told me that he'd been 'subverting gender identity' for a couple of years. He pressured me to visit him, to get drunk, to sleep with him.

He persuaded me that he was in love with me, that he'd kill himself if I didn't return his feelings. So I told him that I did, moved to a different country to be with him.

Then the abuse started. It went on for two-and-a-half-years. It went on until they found another weak-willed, damaged young woman to satisfy his desires. I threw him out as soon as he told me that he was in love with her and fucking her.

They lasted a couple of years. I would send her anonymous messages, warning her about him. I don't think she listened.

Why would she? He'd already painted me as the unreliable narrator, the crazy bitch, the frigid shrew, the harpy.

Why would she listen to me over him? Maybe they parted ways amicably. I cannot know. I hope she wasn't hurt. I hope she wasn't raped.

He beat me throughout traveling across Europe, while we were isolated in that house in the middle of nowhere. He beat me at my Dad's house, breaking a phone handset around the side of my head, and then telling my Dad that I did it. No matter how many times I told my Dad what happened, he'd always look at the cracked handset and laugh at me, "you have quite a temper, huh?"

True, but that breakage wasn't my doing. No matter how many times I told him, he would always "forget" and tease me later.

After I threw him out, I suffered from PTSD-like symptoms. I did not seek diagnosis. I knew that he would be the supported party, knew that if I couldn't label the problem as "male violence" that no-one would understand or believe me. "Oh, that hysterical woman!" They would say, "It's probably borderline. She's probably mental. After all, who is more oppressed in this world than men in dresses?"

Loud sounds still set me off. The last time I saw the abuser, in a bar, they said, "Oh, hullo!" to me as if they were greeting an old friend. My heart was a hummingbirds' wings, my vision cloudy and tunneled, and I persuaded my friends to leave with me ASAP. It took me days to recover from even that miniscule amount of contact. I threw up, I did not sleep, I could not stop shaking.

Sometimes I still have flashbacks to them throttling me. Or, more sickening, to them hounding me to do their make-up for them. Or lend them my clothes (which were always returned smelly and stretched) or compliment them on their hair/nails/make-up/anything at all.

Five years on, I live in an apartment that overlooks the one in which they beat, raped and humiliated me for eighteen months. I must switch to third person if I am to avoid a panic attack.

Every day, I look at that window, and remember the young woman who escaped. She didn't get far, but it was far enough.

She is healing. She will never let anyone close enough for that to happen again. She struggles with food and going outside.

Still, she is more than the mere shadow that he reduced her to; she is growing. She threw the next boyfriend out, too.

He wasn't abusive, but she'd come to realise that she was gay, and that no amount of forcing herself to comply to male demands could change that fundamental truth.

Even denying and squashing that truth down had made her sick and sad. The pretense had gone on for too long; men were, definitively, trash to her.

Even the ones who wore eyeshadow and called themselves Alice.

today i saw a photo of a woman with a tattoo on her abdomen: the skeleton of a baby, stretched across from hip to hip, reminiscent of a water color painting.

upon seeing it, i felt sorrow, as it looked like a memorial tattoo. (the photo came with no context, so i can only assume.)

the original poster accused it of being grotesque and creepy. in the comments below, someone chimed in that they wanted a tattoo of their own inspired by it, but for different reasons: as a transgender woman, their tattoo would symbolize never being able to have kids of their own.

at this, the original poster acquiesced: "oh, i guess there is one not grotesque interpretation."

instantly, i felt furious. here were people picking apart the grief of a woman they never met, yet when a transgender woman said they wanted it, suddenly it was acceptable.

this is part of why i do not believe that transgender women will ever be able to understand the struggle of womanhood, no matter how fervently they claim to

i see constant displays of their ignorance: the suggestion that they, too, feel 'period pain' and female hormonal cycles, or their insistence upon breastfeeding while swollen with artificial hormones, or the lamentation of their status as "infertile women" - as if the consequences of choosing to transition could possibly be compared to infertility through accident or unstoppable medical conditions.

it feels like watching children playing pretend, fueled by their imaginations into thinking they're dinosaurs or pirates or fairies. but these are grown adults, believing that if they do X or do Y, that they can know what it is to be a woman as if they had been swaddled in pink from the day they were born.

what a luxury it would be, to arrive to womanhood so late in the game.

as biological women, we are haunted by our physical forms from the moment we take our first breaths: groomed to become broodmares and damned when we deviate for any reason (regardless of whether it was our choice or not), our bodies are the battleground we wage wars on, fighting desperately to protect our own autonomy.

we are not public property, though we are raised to believe the opposite. every inch of our flesh is considered an open forum where heated debate takes

place; whether it's about what we look like or what we do with ourselves, there is nowhere we can turn where people respect that our bodies are not vessels, but us, wholly and completely - and that we are the ultimate keepers of these temples.

there's never a day that goes by that i forget that i'm female; not in the strangely fetishistic way that a man might describe me (such as my chest bouncing as i go down the stairs), but in that i am reminded of the limitations set upon me because of my sex. listing all the ways people consider being female a dead-end to anything but procreation would take too long.

even now as i write this, i have learned a new facet of my existence: if i were to memorialize the loss of my child, there would be people who might mock me for it - but only because i'm female. as it turns out, my birth sex is the difference between honorable suffering and being considered "cringey."

yet here we are, with an entire subset of people on the outside, looking at the trauma and agony we inherit from our mothers and pass on to our daughters, looking at the cruelty strangers will levy at us even in our darkest moments, and saying: oh, i know what that's like

you don't.

i respect the debilitating condition that is dysphoria, but this is not an excuse to piggyback off of the pain that we go through because of our bodies, or (god forbid) covet and envy us for it.

what's worse? to say that you understand our lives better than we do, or to see our scars and trace your fingers across them while wishing they were yours?

it strikes me as voyeuristic and sadistic, to mourn a suffering you can never be exposed to - and it only ever seems to be out of desire to legitimize their own idea of womanhood, rather than coming from a place of attempted empathy.

i'm sure that seems a little cold, but i have no warmth for someone who sees a symbol of a woman's agony and only focuses on how they could take it from her and fit it to their own life, regardless of how personal it was to her.

a symbol, i will state again, that was described as grotesque. this adjective was only revoked when the idea was applied to a transgender woman, as if this anonymous woman's inherent female status made the original concept disgusting.

how could you see this obvious double standard and still think that our experiences are remotely equivalent? how could you not see the way that being female is such a

crucial piece of this puzzle? how could you tell yourself that you could ever know what our lives are like?

our tears are not yours, our blood is not yours, our traumas and our heartaches and our struggles are not yours. no amount of wishful thinking or reframing things to resemble our experiences will ever make our lives yours.

the female experience is a distinctive one, and it shouldn't be considered heresy to state this.

and it's maddening to know that it's such a shallow jealousy, an envy of our parts rather than our whole selves; wishing for our breasts and our wombs and our bodies while blithely ignorant to the realities we face because of them.

when i think of what womanhood looks like from the outside, i could see how one might want it, especially if you chop it up into bite-sized pieces with only the prettiest ones on display. if you never bother to look behind the curtain, it seems a lot nicer than it is.

but that's not reality.

you covet our breasts, but don't understand the pain that comes from having innocent body parts hyper-sexualized and banned from public spaces.

you covet our wombs, but don't understand that we aren't trusted to know what to do with them.

you covet our bodies, but don't understand that we're only ever seen as chattel and property because of them.

you covet our lives, but you don't understand what we live through.

how's that for grotesque?

D.'s Story

You told me you were different. When I met you at a queer Christmas party, you were shy, kind, approachable. And after a particularly terrible breakup, I was excited to make a new friend, to be around others so as to avoid the painful loneliness I felt every time I went home to my empty and cold apartment.

You told me you were different. We shared our love of music, nerdy video games and card games, and social justice issues. You were funny and not as shy as I'd previously thought, but it worked, since I never liked doing most of the talking.

You told me you were different. We shared stories of sexual assault and negative relationships we both had. I told you about the two guys who had been my friends but who had ignored me when I said no, or simply assumed they could kiss me and touch me just because we were laying next to each other one day, never mind that our group of friends were there too, surrounding us, making me feel awkward, yet obliged to give in to the situation. This was years ago and it has never left me.

You told me about your ex-boyfriend, a trans man who had abused you emotionally and sexually. I didn't know this person, and I believed you. I think I still might, as I don't want to doubt anyone's story.

'Cis men are the worst,' we agreed, 'but trans men can be just as bad.'

You told me you were different. You made me feel like it was only cis and trans men I had to look out for and hold my guard up against. But at a sleepover we shared, one that was quite amicable I thought, nothing more, you initiated something. In your bedroom in the basement, small, dark and warm, you kissed me, touched me, asked me to touch you.

Even though I was your friend, even though I thought you were cute, I didn't want this. I did it though; I didn't want you to feel bad. I've always had an issue with saying no, not wanting to disappoint people. I didn't want you to think it was because you were trans, early in your transition.

You told me you were different, but despite it being you who initiated that, you were mad when I told you I wanted to date someone else. When I told you that while I liked you, I couldn't date you. I told you I wanted to try a polyamorous relationship, something I didn't think you would go for, largely to be able to be in a different relationship. I'll admit, I made some mistakes here. I wasn't ready for that kind of relationship, and I never want to be in a polyamorous relationship again. But at the time, it meant I didn't have to date you.

You told me you were different, but despite initiating all that at our sleepover, you later blamed me, for "moving too quickly" and "not making sure you were comfortable" as if I had been the one to kiss you first. You made me feel confused, doubt myself. Sometimes I still do. I blamed myself for my part in it, wishing I had said no and stopped it, and in that way there'd have been no ambiguity over the situation. I never really considered this as sexual assault, and I still don't, though I'm sure others would. You started it, I was uncomfortable, but I didn't say no when I could have, should have, and in that way I made it appear as if I was fine with what was happening. I wish I'd said something.

We don't talk anymore, and that's fine, because you told me you were different, but that was a lie.

The Cycle is You by Anonymous

When said you were afraid
of dying. I said we'd go to Africa.
There, we would go country
by country, looking for vampires.

When you said you were afraid
of scientists accounting your bones
as male, I said I'd gild your skeleton,
mark your grave, defy the future.

When you said you were afraid
of the sky, falling up, I said I would
anchor you. I coaxed you onto the
lawn for cigarettes and warm touch.

When you said you were afraid
of spiders, I vanquished, efficient
held you through the overwrought
hysteria. Girls, after all, scream.

When you said you were afraid
of not passing, I launched into
one of several dozen speeches
Cracking, choking on praise.

When you said you were afraid
of using the microwave, I swallowed
my incredulous jolt. Like all things,
of course, I can do this for you

When you said you were afraid

that no one would believe you,

I reassured you your lie was the truth.

You reaped the benefits of implication.

When you said you were afraid

of me dying, I willed myself to live

clinging to apologies in our deep,

dark chasm. I stayed there. Until

When you said you were afraid

of me leaving, I was so sorry.

You said you'd die without me.

You just started again.

Delete by Anonymous

It started off innocently enough. We were AIM buddies; I had many of them. I identified as genderfluid, but was leaning toward transition, scheduling a breast reduction to appear more androgynous and talking to my doctor about testosterone. I just wanted a lower voice, thinking people would take my music more seriously if I could pass as a feminine man. It seemed right that if I was this desperate to escape femaleness, I should assume the best of every trans person I met.

I never learned any name for this person except Ashley. At the beginning, we talked about cooking, about music, and he sent me photos of his outfits on days when he felt especially cute. He was lonely, living an ocean away from his home country, as I was lonely, living half a continent away from anyone who cared about me.

After a decade of being a girl on the internet, I'd developed the skills to gently dodge conversations with men when they turned sexual and prying. My defenses were down with this man who called himself a woman. As our talks progressed, he was able to steer the focus toward sex and fantasies so deftly that I never saw it coming until I was already revealing more details than I wanted to. And that was a lot of detail -- at the time, I was living with a partner who had groomed me into a full-time BDSM relationship where I was one of two

women who submitted to his fetishes. I'd gone pretty numb to weird sex, oversharing, and having details of my sex life be public knowledge. It was just part of the game, but something about the way Ashley dug into me seemed off in a way I couldn't describe.

The first time Ashley sent me a nude photo, he claimed it was an accident, he'd just meant to send another outfit picture and clicked on the wrong one. He apologized profusely for my seeing this image of him, shot from behind, on all fours on a bed, penis fully erect behind a dangling scrotum, asshole gaping and lubricated.

"I'm so, so sorry," he told me. "You were never meant to see that."

And then, a minute later: "...but what did you think?"

I don't remember how I responded.

After getting out of that relationship, I discovered feminism for the first time, but continued toward transition. When I began to talk about feminism with Ashley, he pushed the conversation toward the sex-positive movement. "I'm not a smart girl," he told me. "All I want is to be a mindless whore." He talked about how empowered he felt by being a "stupid slut."

I didn't have the courage to block him then, even though as the months progressed, he no longer wanted to exchange recipes or talk about music. I'd get detailed messages from him at 2AM: "I had such a great night tonight. Four black guys ran a train on me and I snorted coke off one of their dicks. They kept telling me what a hot little bitch I was."

I began actively trying to change the subject, or to simply ignore his messages, but he'd get hostile and accuse me of being a prude or a slut shamer. I told him I was working through issues with my own sexuality related to the BDSM grooming and that hearing sexually explicit stuff like that brought stuff up in a bad way. He laughed at me.

I had a breakdown for unrelated reasons after two years of sporadically talking to Ashley online, and during this breakdown I faced the real reasons I was transitioning: a false narrative surrounding the difference between femaleness and femininity, poisonous ideas about what it meant to be a woman, attempting to identify out of ways I felt pressured to behave rather than simply dismissing those ideas. In an attempt to gain some quiet and clarity in regards to my gender, I blocked all my trans chat buddies and tried to just figure things out on my own. Ashley messaged me a few weeks later, from a different account.

"Why did you block me?"

"I'm sorry -- I've been trying to figure some stuff out and I blocked a lot of people."

"I had to tell you about something amazing," he said. "This redneck guy paid me a thousand dollars to let his German Shepherd fuck me. God, it hurt so bad, he clawed the hell out of my back. Dog dicks are different too, I thought I liked it better when he had me suck it, but I keep thinking of it inside me and it just gets me so horny."

"Did you need the money?" I managed.

"lol yes," he responded, and sent a photo of some thigh-high Louboutin boots. "He wants to do it again soon. I can't wait."

I deleted AIM soon after that. I can't get rid of the mental images. I can't shake the knowledge that this is supposedly representative of what women are like. That this is sex positivity.

That someone would push a woman into conversations like that even after hearing that she's working through sexual trauma.

I was able to delete AIM, but I can't delete any of that.

In high school I was a part of a group therapy program. We had meetings twice every month. It was mostly comprised of neurodivergent students, kids who were bullied frequently, kids who had trauma or were abused, or anyone else who felt like they didn't belong. I was autistic and my counselor suggested I go to the meetings to make friends. I actually liked it, at first. I liked talking about my specific issues and discussing methods of coping with others.

There was one guy who stared at me every session. Whenever I would look up back at him, he would quickly avert his gaze. Then he would go right back to staring at me.

His name was Dan but he wanted everyone to call him Dannie He had a godawful, greasy, mullet hair cut that went down to his shoulders, wore a handkerchief around his neck, wore leather studded bracelets, and the same pair of skinny jeans every single day. He also identified as a nonbinary girl. Of course, at the time I tried to be as accommodating as possible and always used his preferred pronouns. I always called him a she.

Dan was an incredibly awkward kid. When he did talk, he mumbled and muttered everything he had to say

One day he asked me for my phone number. I wanted to say no, but I wanted to be nice. I didn't want to be mean. So we exchanged numbers, and it was a pretty big mistake.

As soon as I got home he texted me. He wanted help with his math homework, apparently. I told him I was terrible at math too. He took photos of his homework and sent them to me, still asking for help. I explained to him I had no clue what the hell he wanted from me, I didn't even take that kind of math class. He got upset with me, for some strange reason.

Time passed and he still texted me. He'd send anime memes he screenshotted from twitter and reddit. I would halfheartedly reply with "lol" every time. I told him I liked anime before, so now this was exclusively what he talked about with me.

One day in group therapy we began a discussion that involved sexual assault- specifically being sexually abused by family members. A few of the girls in the group talked about their experiences. As consolation I told a girl that I knew what it felt like, I went through something similar. I didn't elaborate, but I wanted to support her. Dan, who seated himself next to me like he always did, was breathing heavily down my neck. He seemed interested.

The next day I received a text from him- asking me about my assault. He sounded like he wanted to know the details. I told him I didn't want to talk about it- using the most polite and non-confrontational tone I could possibly muster over text. He wasn't having it. He accused me of not trusting him. If we were friends, then that meant I should trust him and tell him about my experience. He wanted to know what happened. He framed his nagging with sincerity- he claimed he was worried about me and wanted to 'comfort' me. He pestered and manipulated me. He told me that he trusted me - why didn't I trust him?

I finally caved in and told him my cousin molested me when I was in elementary school. That's as specific as I was. He still wasn't satisfied. He wanted to know what exactly happened, he wanted every detail. He asked if I was fingered, if my cousin made me perform oral sex on him, asked if he touched my breasts.

He wanted me to describe it to him like a goddamn screenplay.

I freaked out and cried. I sent him a text telling him that he was being creepy and an asshole. I turned my phone off and threw it at the wall. The next morning I woke up and turned it back on- he sent me dozens more messages. He was 'cry typing', sending me numerous misspelled apologies and pathetic bumbling texts that claimed that he was sorry.

"Im sorr y im su dch a piece of shit,"

"Im,, reeally awful imms sorry"

"I jusst wnanted to knoww what happenend im sorry im shit im shit"

"Im, relally sorry i fucjked up"

"Im gogingn to slit my wriests im sorry im fuckenig eveil"

Panic washed over me, and I immediately texted him back.

"No!! No you didn't do anything wrong! Please don't hurt yourself. I'm sorry I overreacted. I'm fine please don't do anything. I was being overly sensitive."

He didn't reply. I felt awful the whole weekend.

Then came Monday, and I saw him in school. I was relieved to see he wasn't dead - but I still didn't want to talk to him. He approached me, and showed off his scarred wrists to me, telling me he did it to punish himself. He wanted me to forgive him. I was mortified.

The school year passed by. It was now near the end of May. Over this period of time he constantly asked to hang out with me, and I always made up an excuse, telling him I was busy. One time he even made a

vaguepost about me on Facebook, calling me a slut. I commented on it calling him out, and he quickly took it down and sent me a text saying

"Im sorry im going thru some tough stuff right now life is hard."

I didn't bother asking him what was wrong even though I knew he wanted me to.

Finally, he eventually asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend. I said no, in the most kind way I could muster. Of course he got offended and angry- and accused me of rejecting him because he was trans. He knew I was bi- so why wouldn't I want to date him? I was attracted to "everyone", right? The next day a friend told me he was making immature Facebook posts about me.

He harassed me constantly after that. Barging in on me and my friend's table during our lunch period. He annoyed and whined at me- but never raised his voice. He always spoke in that same, monotone, sniveling voice he always did. He would sandwich himself between me and my friend, wanting to talk to me. Awkward and pitiful and non-threatening. He would spy on me in the library, follow me when I walked out. And of course, he waltzed into the female bathroom right after I did in an attempt to get away from him. One time I was even talking to a teacher alone in a classroom after a period ended, and Dan came clamoring in to stare at me

Next school year, thank god, I didn't see him as much. I blocked his phone number and blocked him on Facebook. (over the course of a few months I unfriended him repeatedly and always added him back out of pity)

In art club that year, I was talking about him with a group of other girls. They all had similar stories as to how he harassed them as well. One girl even said he asked for nudes, and threatened suicide when she didn't send him any. Another girl said he asked her if he could try her bra on. And after that, another girl said he even tried to touch her breasts out of nowhere.

All these girls were in similar situations as me. We were all shy, wallflower types who were into nerdy stuff like gaming and drawing anime fan art, so of course, we all attracted the nerdy, creepy guy who was also into that stuff.

I'm glad I don't have to see that freak ever again.

Not long after I started identifying as a trans guy, my friend broke up with her long-term boyfriend.

After he learned I was trans, the ex-boyfriend started hitting on me, and then told me that he was considering transitioning.

She (the ex-boyfriend) started identifying as a girl.

She started messaging me about kinks, like being sexually interested in diapers, giving me way too much unwanted information about her sexual activities. Her behavior made me feel uncomfortable, used and fetishized.

I soon found out that she had been emotionally and sexually abusive to my friend.

At summer camp, I met a trans woman who said that she was wanting to transition. I was excited to find another trans person to talk to, and we exchanged Facebook information. When I got home and we started messaging on Facebook, she started sending me graphic details of her sex life.

There was an uncomfortable age gap between us, and she was an adult.

There was a trans girl at my high school (I'll call her "H" to preserve anonymity) a few grades above me. We shared a class, and at first I appreciated her speaking up about trans representation in our learning material--but it quickly got to the point where she was constantly interrupting our (female) teacher, ranting about the material and derailing the class.

Our teacher was consistently apologetic that there wasn't more representation, and she did what she could to improve things in that area and acknowledge this, but there wasn't much she could do about it. Still, my classmate kept interrupting her and pushing and being very rude.

H and I kept contact over social media, but it got to the point where I decided to unfriend her because of the awful things she was posting about trans guys. She later messaged me and started getting into an argument about it. I had told her before that these discussions were very bad for my mental health, but she ignored all boundaries.

She kept harassing me and making passive aggressive posts about me with relation to the discourse (which had to do with the type of stuff she'd been posting about trans guys), until I asked her again to stop because it was pushing me into a mental health crisis.

I was on good terms with someone on tumblr, who had a trans girlfriend she said she loved a lot. This person had to take a hiatus from tumblr, because it turns out that her trans girlfriend had been abusing her.

I (used to be) friends with a trans woman who turned out to be abusive to her girlfriend. She also groped me without my consent, told me to keep it a secret, and gaslighted me and her girlfriend about it when I didn't keep it a secret--and I had been scared to speak up; scared that she would physically assault me.

I made friends with a trans woman who I thought was pretty cool, but I always had an off feeling about her that I tried to ignore. We weren't close, and I stopped talking to her after she sent me an unsolicited dick pic.

While I was in the trans community, I felt enormously unsupported. The community made me feel so, so much worse about my trans identity, feelings, and experiences. I clearly saw the pattern of abuse and mistreatment against trans men, and I knew it was the same thing we'd always been put through, it was the

same tired old story--sexism. But this time, I didn't have the words to talk about it or express it. And this time, nobody cared.

It was considered acceptable for trans women to say horrible things about trans men, including calling us transphobic and misogynistic slurs. And if any of us called a trans woman out on it, or if we dared to talk about abuse we faced at the hands of trans women, we were deemed transmisogyistic.

Meanwhile, it was accepted and encouraged to hyper-scrutinize and call trans men out for every tiny little thing, from "A trans man made a post talking about his experiences, and didn't center trans women or explain that his issues aren't as important as trans women's issues enough" to "The majority of people who think that important medical words should have meaning (aka "truscum", who believe that the meaning of "trans" should mean "a person who has gender/sex dysphoria") are trans men! Trans men shouldn't have boundaries or movements for important medical conditions that affect their entire lives!"

The pattern of violence from trans women is constantly brushed under the rug, while trans men are demonized for stepping a toe out of line, small offences, and having a voice or having boundaries (no matter how kind and meek and catering he is about it).

I can't even count the number of times I've seen trans women behave in horrible, misogynistic, homophobic, and violent ways (nor the number of times these instances are ignored, supported, and celebrated by the trans community). Biologically female people aren't even allowed to say no-- "thank you for letting me know you're trans, but no I don't wish to meet up in person for a date", "no, I don't want to dance with you", "no, I'm not interested", "no, I made this group to be female-exclusive, and I wish it to remain that way"-- without being considered a horrible bigot, and often threatened and called misogynistic slurs, harassed, or even doxxed.

As usual, a female person having boundaries or saying no to a male person is considered the worst crime, a hate crime, deserving of torture and rape and death.

I do not wish for my words to be used by conservatives who do not understand oppression, who will take my words and use them to say, "See? Men in dresses are sick."

You have no compassion for us. You will use anything you can to demonize oppressed groups, while refusing to acknowledge the wider pattern that very much includes the normalized and privileged. Gender

nonconformity is not your enemy. Dysphoric people are not your enemy.

This is to speak out on the bigotry that my oppressors have been silencing us on, to speak out about the abuse and misogyny that my community has supported.

This is about male-pattern violence, and how much sexism has been enabled to fester and grow within the trans movement, how easily reversals and censorship and violence flourish with modern gender politics.

I am writing this in secret. It is the sixty-seventh book of the Bible for God's concubines. I have heard that there was more than one before myself— in that case, this is a love letter to each of us, from my heart to ours, wherever we are, however many of us there are. I am writing in secret because this thing that binds us is probably shame.

I know that the girl before me was a lesbian. That's how he becomes interested. Maybe the girl before me was also a crushed flower, perfumed in her own weakness. Like flies to honey. Like men to a girl. Perhaps the girl before me was the opposite; perhaps she was like a root in the earth. I've never met the girl before me. Perhaps she was not his feast. I hope not.

We (me, and the girl before me) could trade many secrets. I will go first: I was stupid enough to believe him, and self-hating enough to worship him. Were you? Did it make a difference? (If I sound like I am begging for an answer, I am. I am desperate to wring some sort of lesson from this, even years later. Could I have stopped him sooner? Could I live with the answer to that?) Another secret: I was a child. I was eighteen, but I was a child. Eighteen cannot prepare you for being alone in the city of angels. Eighteen cannot prepare you for a man looking for a girl. Eighteen does not show you truth

from lie. I was all of my years of naivety collected together in a heap of blind trust.

Now it is your turn to tell me a secret. Did you climb out of your body to escape him? How about your mind? What corners did he follow you to? Where was the panopticon of your humiliation? Mine was a classroom. I learned many lessons. The first I learned is that God hears prayers, even if they are not addressed to him. If you beg bread from his Church, the Messiah will know about it. God will meet you where you are— in every hallway, in each bathroom, at your desk in each class you share with him. Sometimes, God will try to follow you home. You would do well not to think about it too much as you cover your tracks. On Sunday, you will be back in Church, singing his praises. You have nowhere else to go.

The second lesson I learned is that we are all made in the image of God. He will touch you here and there, coming out of nowhere to caress that which was made to please him. He will cut a foam mattress topper into a caricature of your hips, thanking you for divine inspiration. Even God needs a muse. One day, as you are giving a speech to a classroom full of little angels, God will come in late and squeeze your breasts from behind for all to see. He says he is memorizing the size so that he can compete with his foam mattress topper body. Onlookers are blinded like Saul on the road to Damascus. At least this is how it seems— they watch

with unseeing eyes, and say nothing. The Messiah settles into his seat and you burn from the shame of your sin. That night, you lock the door and try to scratch the mark of the Beast off of your sinner's body. You burn yourself in boiling water, to wash away your sins. You pick up your phone and send a prayer, "Lord Jesus, why have you done this to me? Was I not a humble servant?"

The Messiah answers, "I like you. I was just flirting."

The third lesson I learned is that prophets are rarely believed by their fellow men of God. The Messiah will say to His prophet, this is how you may please me. He will say these things to you in front of the masses, but the Word of God will fall flat upon their hearts. You will go to the preacher. You will tell the preacher exactly what the Messiah whispered into your ear. "The Lord hath said unto me that he has a girlfriend who looks just like me— that part is very important. He says that His will be done, whenever, wherever. The Lord hath said unto me that he likes to fuck Her cis girlfriend's pussy raw. She enjoys being a lesbian and doing lesbian things, like forcing Her girlfriend to suck Her girldick in front of open windows and fisting Her girlfriend unexpectedly. The Lord hath said unto me that She wants me to take my turn in this 'girl talk'— it would give God euphoria. I have told the Lord that I don't like to hear these things, but the Lord's will be done."

The preacher will call you a blasphemer and an agent of the Devil. Here is another secret: I was too fearful to spread the Word of God further than the preacher. I got on my hands and knees and begged forgiveness from a man of God, and he anointed my head with oil, saying, "Sometimes our interpretations of what others say is a manifestation of our own biases or bigoted beliefs."

I repented. Perhaps I was not cut out to be a prophet.

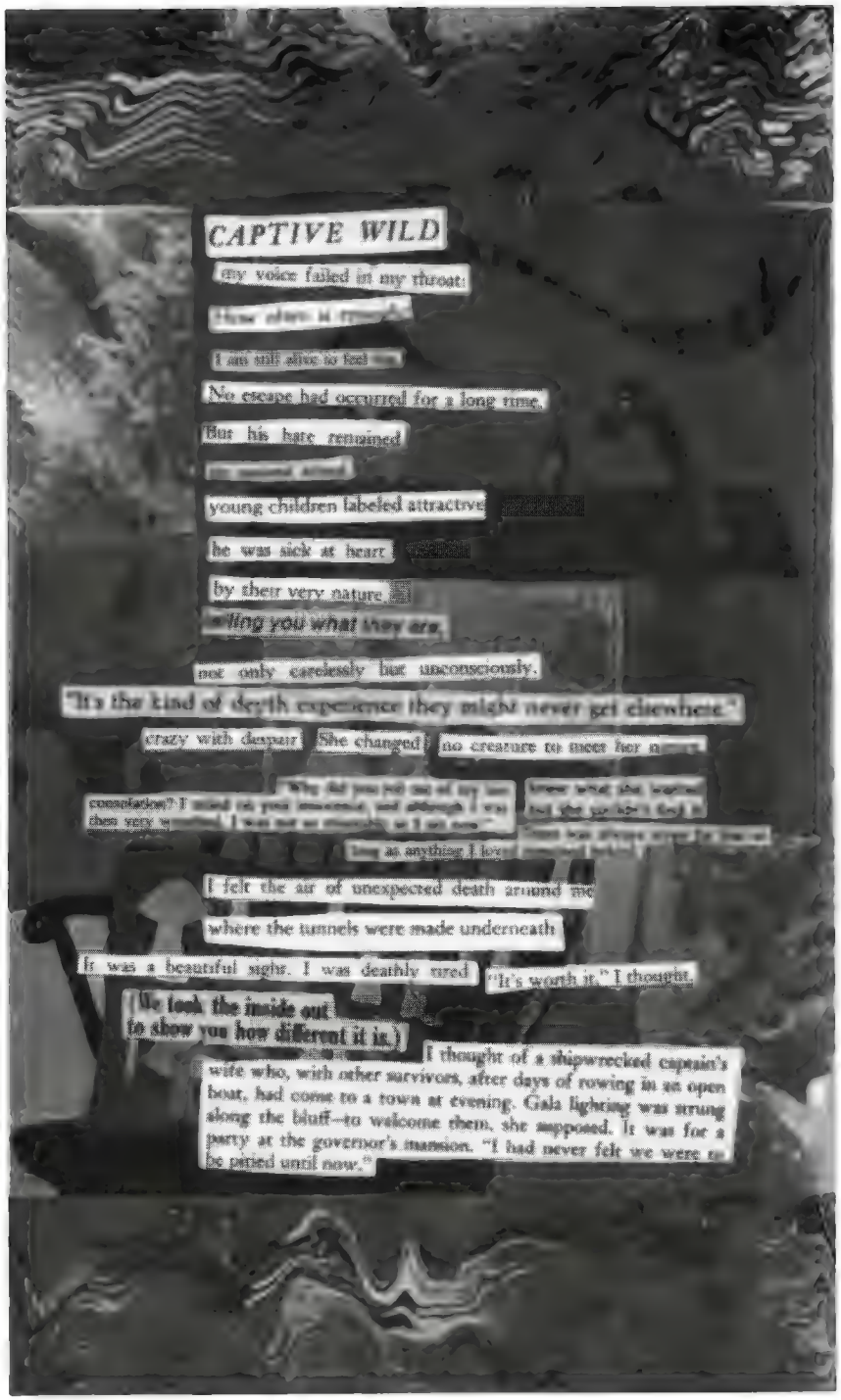
The fourth lesson that I learned is that thou shalt not worship false idols. The Lord visited me every day, and with him brought his prophecies and his grasping hands. One day the Lord asked me to become one of His brides. "Oh Lord, I am a lesbian—"

If you say no to God, He will smite you. His Church will snatch back the bread from your mouth. You will be a pariah, walking the earth as one outcast from Heaven. The Lord spoke to me again, after seven days and seven nights: "I want to fuck you."

I plead with the Lord, I tried to wrap my body in barbed wire. The mark of the Beast burned my flesh. I knew that if it weren't there, the Lord would not be doing this to me. I hated myself for being born with it. The Messiah reminded me that he himself created my body, of which I am a mere steward; all on this earth is His, for the glory of God, forever and ever, Amen. He is a jealous God. He touched me, and I fled from my mind. He says that my

love for the mark of the Beast is a perversion, a heresy. His church agrees. He calls my sexuality a hateful thing. I built a funeral pyre and cast myself upon it, for the Lord says that all those who hate him love death. I burned my body upon the pyre and with it, the golden calf of my desire.

These are the lessons I learned during my year walking with God. In the end, before I submitted to his will, an apostate whispered to me, "You are not the first. There was a girl last year— she got a restraining order. He doesn't have a girlfriend. Those things he says are just his fantasies. Be careful." I had not been very careful. He knew where I lived now, and I would catch glimpses of him on my street. He never did figure out the apartment number. I left the school without telling anyone. I still have not finished my degree. I am not sure if I can ever go back. I was humiliated in every hallway, at every desk. Right now I am thinking of the girl before me. I wonder if she knew of the girl before her. I wonder if she knows how many came after. I wonder how many of us have swallowed his words, drinking of His cup to cure us of perversion. I wonder how many of us took up our apostasy in silence. I don't think I will ever figure out the answer to these questions; it is all a secret.


CAPTIVE WILD
my voice failed in my throat
I am still alive to feel
No escape had occurred for a long time.
But his hate remained
young children labeled attractive
he was sick at heart
by their very nature
telling you what they are.
not only carelessly but unconsciously.
"It's the kind of depth experience they might never get elsewhere."
crazy with despair. She changed
I felt the air of unexpected death around me
where the tunnels were made underneath
It was a beautiful sight. I was deathly tired. "It's worth it," I thought.
[We took the inside out
to show you how different it is.]
I thought of a shipwrecked captain's wife who, with other survivors, after days of rowing in an open boat, had come to a town at evening. Gala lighting was strung along the bluff—to welcome them, she supposed. It was for a party at the governor's mansion. "I had never felt we were to be pitied until now."

Connect the dots to finish the Picture!
The thought of possible danger had not entered my mind
problem that men don't have.
He was prepared to bite
Not Every Inheritance Is a Blessing
who ever thought they'd improve
protect you...
YOU NEEDN'T SUFFER
There is really some safety in numbers

age of consent by anonymous

It's Spring, and I'm meeting your new girlfriend,
and I recognize her.
She was at the New Year's party.
She looked young, but we all looked young.
At twenty I could have passed for fifteen.
(age is arbitrary anyway)
I sat outside the circle
while the group played spin the bottle.
She went first, and the bottle landed
on someone who I knew was twenty.
Your new girlfriend crawled on her hands and knees,
across the circle, everyone watching, grinning, clapping,
and I want to ask, and I feel like I should ask,
but I don't ask.
We watched until someone else took a turn.

It's Spring, and I'm meeting your new girlfriend.
Your bedroom door is open. I glance inside.
There's fetish gear on the floor —
Rope, collars, riding crops, a Hitachi wand
(which you mention gets plenty of use)

We all laugh, and then you crudely pantomime,
in great detail,
the manner in which you use it on her.
Your new girlfriend looks at the floor.
And in the daylight, standing next to you,
I can see just how young your new girlfriend looks.
and I want to ask, and I feel like I should ask,
but I don't ask.
We started talking about something else.

It's Winter, and I'm at your new girlfriend's house.
The house is desperately clean.
I felt like I shouldn't have come inside.
We are just quickly visiting, it's early afternoon,
we can't stay long,
(because you're not supposed to be there)
You're turning 21 soon and you tower over her.
The rain outside is loud and you are speaking quietly.
Your new girlfriend tells me her parents
don't want you to be together.
(because you were a grown man)

she says something about homework,

(because she was just a fucking kid)

and I want to ask, and I feel like I should ask,

but I don't have to ask.

Your new girlfriend tells me she's in high school.

KC's Story

This is not a chronological account of events. there's a lot of things I don't remember and probably more I pretend I forgot.

I was 15 when we met. He was 16. high school freshman and sophomore. second period, Spanish one. I remember where he sat, but not where I did. I remember that we had the same frames for our glasses. I remember looking at his button-down shirt and bowtie and short blonde hair, his skinny frame, and thinking, that's exactly how I'd look, if I were a boy. I remember thinking he was gay. Sometimes I think the worst part of it is that I reached out to him. He didn't seek me out, and he never would have been brave enough to approach me on his own. I remember seeing him doodle a tardis in his notebook and thinking to myself, as embarrassing and funny as it is now, "I bet he uses tumblr" (I was right), and that's what made me decide we should be friends. I don't remember how I approached him. It shames me to say it but there's a very real possibility that I told him I liked his shoelaces. This would have been 2012.

We started talking on Facebook and texting all the time. He had a shitty flip phone. Mine was the kind with a keyboard. He told me he thought he might be gay, I said

I thought I was too. He told me about his issues with self-harm, something I was going through too- but he was more violent and extreme, and I was worried about him a lot. He told me about his dad and how he was mocked and pushed around, how his family didn't care at all that he was slicing up his arms. Soon I was taking care of him. I would stare at the screen of my phone anxiously while trying to talk him out of hurting himself while my friends continued life around me. I guess I didn't notice the way I drifted from them but soon he was nearly my only friend. It did not take long for us to start dating. I have no memory of how exactly that began.

So, so frequently he would tell me he was thinking of hurting himself, or worse. At least once a day, or that's how it felt. I became practiced at talking him down. Much of my time in high school was spent trying to keep him alive, or from hurting himself (so I believed). It didn't take long for our conversations to start following a pattern. we would be talking (texting), and his messages would become disjointed, full of (intentional) typos. This was supposed to signal to me that he was panicky and upset, and might do something to hurt himself. Usually, his preferred method of soothing was to exchange sexual texts. Not really quite sexting, our phones weren't picture capable, and I'm so thankful for that. It was effectively cybersex over text, he needed me to describe 'what I would do if he was there'. For years we were in a

continuous text conversation. Virtually we were never apart.

But we were together a lot in person, too.

I remember too many instances of negotiated boundaries and blurry boundaries to count. none that I feel comfortable defining. Many of which I still feel I carry the blame for. It was so constant and I was so resigned to it. He pulled some classic cards, the ones all teen boys have up their sleeves. Blue balls, no self control. Another usual maneuver was pushing in public, where I felt I had to act like nothing was happening. High school lunch, a water park, the backseat of the car somebody else was driving, etc. I can't forget the time he pushed his fingers into me in the backseat of our friend's car- again, embarrassing to even type, but his unwashed fingers covered in hot cheeto dust burned me badly. I am afraid writing this, because it makes me instantly identifiable to him. If he's been reading this wondering if it's really me, now he knows for sure. He used to love smirking at me and saying "hot cheeto", watching me wince from the memory. I can feel the burning now thinking about it. He thought it was funny but it was really painful. and I was really embarrassed

Another time, we went outside and hid in bushes to smoke weed, not something I was used to. We walked back to his parents' house and snuck down to the basement to sit on the couch and watch movies. I was

so, so high and extremely disoriented... My memory of this is blurry, confusing. I remember my head being pushed down to his lap and his.. thing pushed into my mouth, I remember being confused. I remember sitting on his lap, my pants being pulled down, him trying to force himself into my asshole before I realized what was happening. Or maybe that was a separate occasion. It's so blurry. It's so blurry.

I remember telling him, during an early facebook conversation, about my 'penis aversion'- I had been on tumblr long enough to use this vernacular on my own. I can't blame him for everything, after all. I remember him responding something in the spirit of 'we can fix that'. Maybe I could go back and find these facebook messages but I don't want to know how I responded to him. How much blame do I carry for my failure to set boundaries? This memory is usually followed by another. The head of my bed was in my empty closet. I remember him bracing himself with one hand on the shelf that my wrists were tied up to- a red fuzzy robe sash- the other hand holding the back of my head while he thrusted violently in and out of my mouth. In my version of this memory there are tears streaming down my face, but I think when it happened I was actually just frozen and silent.

Exploring 'kinks' was a frequent theme in our relationship. Petplay, BDSM, violence. It wasn't until his junior year (my sophomore) that he began to explore

crossdressing. I bet he would never admit this but it did start sexually. He wanted me to call him a "good girl", he wanted to wear lacy underwear. Not long after this began he began identifying as a demigirl. Transwoman followed shortly after, I think maybe a few weeks or months. The burdensome text conversations now revolved around "dysphoria" more frequently, again often soothed by sexual exchanges, which were now more degrading and complex to navigate.

Back then I was able to make this make incredible sense, I was even relieved about it. Of course he was trans. Of course he was truly a woman, it made perfect sense. That must have been why I sought him as a friend, somehow I sensed who he 'truly' was... I was glad I could call myself a lesbian again, and I didn't have worry about being the wrong kind, who only dated 'cis' women. All my sins were absolved. I couldn't puzzle out why I was never really attracted to him, and why I still wasn't even when he began 'presenting femininely'. But this part seemed unimportant, and I didn't give it much thought at the time.

Not much about our relationship changed after he started identifying as a woman, now there was a just an added element to keep tabs on. He was one of 6 kids and his family was very conservative and religious. So it became my duty to help him hide his crossdressing, share my clothes with him, and validate his womanhood all in secret, without alerting any adults to the truth.

Eventually he did come out to his family, and they reacted poorly, banning him from crossdressing in the family home or where the younger children might see him. So the sneaking around and lying continued, bringing him my own clothes, bras and underwear. He would wear outfits like shorty-shorts, a bulgy bra over his flat chest and a thin t-shirt. We would walk around the mall, or a theme park, or the museum. I would tell him how pretty he was, how beautiful, how feminine. We went shopping a lot, he shoplifted a lot. He would walk out of a changing room in a dress and I would gasp, widen my eyes, tell him how amazing he looked. I would accompany him into the women's restroom, to assure nobody gave him any trouble. His hair got longer and longer.

By my own junior (his senior) year I was nearly failing out of school, and I was miserable all the time. I started going to an online high school at home. My sleep schedule became bizarre and backwards, I struggled to keep up with writing papers. Sometimes he would write them for me, with the unspoken expectation that I would repay this with sexual favors. Sometimes he came over during the school day, when my parents weren't around. So I guess we had more time together. We spent a lot of time going on drives, too. Neither of us really had many close relationships outside of each other. Our relationship continued this way up to my senior year.

There were probably notable 'incidents' during this time period but if so I can't really put a finger on it.

Another memory I cannot put on a timeline, maybe my sophomore or junior year: we are driving through a grocery store parking lot. I am telling him about the nightmares I've been having, and the panic attacks, and how I am afraid that something may have happened to me as a child that I do not remember. I cannot remember how long after this his confession came. It might have been a few minutes later, on the same day, but it might have been weeks or months later too. He told me that when he was younger (around 12 if i remember right) he made one of his younger brothers touch him sexually, and he molested him. He told me this painfully slowly, and his face was scrunched up like he was crying although there were no tears. He begged me not to hate him, not to judge him, said he hated himself and wanted to die, said a lot of things... I don't know. It is one of my worst memories, comforting him after that. Years later he confessed this to his parents and to my knowledge legal proceedings were brought against him and he was barred from the family home. I have no way to verify this.

By the beginning of my senior year I was exhausted with him, and I had started making friends again. After months of trying to negotiate my way out, I finally broke up with him that October- I remember all the halloween decor. I promised him that of course I would still be his

best friend, and I would always be there for him. Not long after I broke up with him he "tried to kill himself". I went to the hospital where he said he was to try and visit, but he was not there. I don't remember if he ever had an explanation for that.

He really disliked one of the new friends I had made, who I spent a lot of my time with. I introduced them on skype first, before they met in person, and he either asked her if she was, or accused her of being a radfem, or maybe a TERF. As I got closer to her, he hated her more and more. Any time the 3 of us were together he made it a point to talk about our sexual history, or reference things between us. When she and I started dating this didn't change. When I talked to him and mentioned her, he would become angry or defensive. Once, he expressed to me that he believed she was manipulating me, attempting to enter into a codependent relationship with me, and he feared that she would abuse me. There were also times where he tried to initiate sexual encounters with us, like a threesome. Once, after a D&D game, he brought out his vibrator to show my girlfriend and I, acting all coy and talking about being horny.

Right after I started dating her, I was alone with him in an empty house. He pressured me, eventually getting his fingers inside of me- I broke into sobs while it happened. I did not tell my girlfriend what happened

until the next time we tried to have sex and I burst into tears.

A lot of other things happened before I eventually stopped talking to him. There were drug problems, alcohol problems. rehabs, inpatient programs, partial hospitalization plans, and unsettling stories about relationships with women in these places. There were lies he admitted to and replaced with new ones. One time he stole my car and got a DUI, got it impounded and called me in the middle of the night from jail. Once he got himself stranded in an unfamiliar state living with another transwoman, and I got him home when it became unsafe. He told so many stories about horrible things happening to him that I began to doubt their veracity. He got another girlfriend, and I saw how he treated her. They got engaged, he cheated on her.

Once, he tried to apologize. He sent me a text message, where he said he was coercive. he said he had refused to fully understand boundaries. He said he was, 'a selfish person often looking for some way within my addictive behavior to feel better'. This was the last straw for me, and I told him to never contact me again. We have not spoken since. Not long after, I saw him walking around near my apartment building, far from any of his home or any of his bus routes (he can no longer drive a car) Once, over a year later, he was a server at a restaurant I went to. Neither of us acknowledged each other in any

way, but I was shaking the entire meal and most of the way home.

Every year on March 21st I still remember that it's our anniversary, but I don't want to remember this anymore. Even as I write this I can't help but imagine him reading it. It is hard to shake him from my mind, the habit of wondering how my words might affect him. I hope I never see him again.

He's Still Here by S. A.

This is a group of stories about one trans-identified male who I used to be friends with, involving pretty much every girl in my friend group.

The first thing that happened with him was with an older friend of mine. We had both moved from the same town to a different one in the same summer, so we kind of bonded over that, since we knew each other from before. That year she was a senior, and he was a junior. One day she didn't have a ride home, so he offered her one, and when he pulled up in front of her house, he kept the doors locked (it was an older model car, so he was the only one who could control the locks) and refused to let her leave unless she kissed him. I remember what must've been the day after that I walked into the cafeteria for breakfast and saw her sobbing at a table in the corner. A month later she graduated and she didn't tell me what happened until she was at a school halfway across the country. She said the possibility of going to the same college as him was the primary reason she looked for schools so far away.

The next things happened over this school year when he was a senior. He started getting weirder around our female friends, including me. My sister and a couple of other freshmen sat with us at breakfast and lunch, and things started spiraling downwards quickly from there.

He had always had a pretty gross sense of humor, but he started outright making explicit and sexual jokes, which my sister said made her and the other underclassmen really uncomfortable. Another friend and I told him he needed to stop with the jokes, or at least cut back on them until it was just us upperclassmen around. He didn't.

Then one day he started getting touchy with us. The oldest female friend of ours liked wearing dresses and didn't care if they were close to breaking dress code, but she stopped after he grabbed her ass repeatedly. She told me she took out her rage on the dress with a pair of scissors and dumped them in a neighbor's trash can so her mom wouldn't find out about it.

My school has a College Express program for juniors and seniors who wanted to earn college credits in high school. The bus ride to the community college the nearby high schools partnered with was 45 minutes long, and for some reason, we had extra students coming on the trip back with us. That meant that we had to move around the seating a little for the trip back, and I ended up sitting next to him.

At that point, I was pretty wary of him, but I had nowhere else to sit (the first trip back we took at the beginning of the school year had people sitting four to a seat and people were still in the aisles, which is why we had to be extra careful with seating). I felt pretty fine in

that seat, though, since I had friends in the seats around me, so if he tried anything, I felt I would be fine. I was wrong.

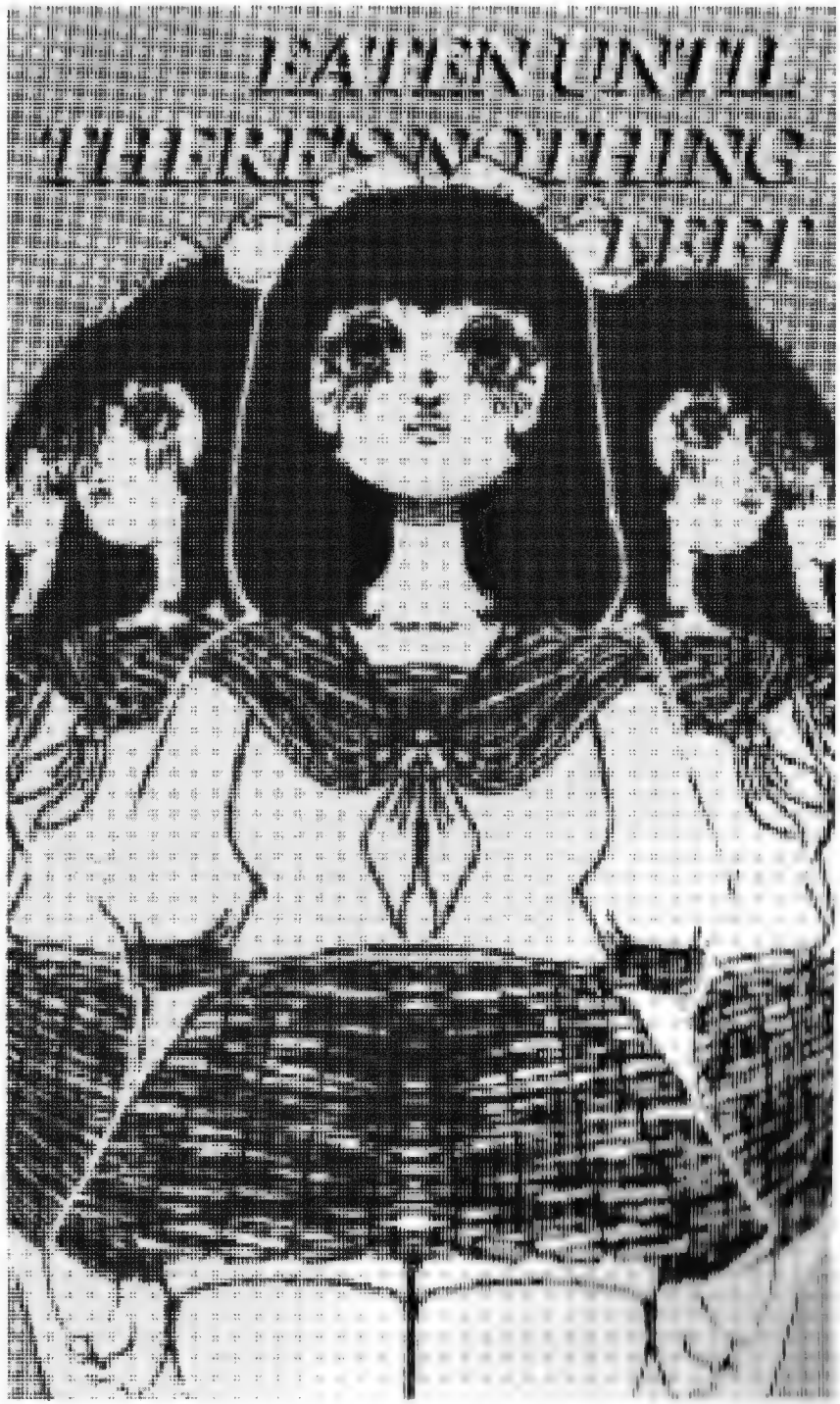
At the start of our second semester, the heaters in the back of the bus where we sat were on full blast, and heat usually makes me sleepy really easily, so I fell asleep a lot in January and February. Apparently, my friends noticed he would lean on me and touch me in my sleep on the rides back, and they didn't do anything about it, didn't even tell me until they had had enough of what he was doing to them. I was pretty vocal about not liking being touched (mainly because of abuse from my ex-step-dad, and just not liking physical contact, to begin with), and everyone knew I hardly even let my family members touch me and that none of my friends would be an exception.

When my 'friends' told me what he did to me, it was the same time I found out about a lot of other shit he'd done (such as taking pictures of some of my freshmen friends' asses, including my sister's, and the groping). They told me they were going to send a long, long message to him about the crap he did (as if he didn't know) and telling him to leave us alone. Thankfully he did, but he never responded to the message, and I overheard him telling a mutual friend that we had ganged up on him and he didn't know what he did wrong. As if three girls a foot shorter than him and half his weight could intimidate him in the way he had us.

We lost a few friends with that message. One girl saying we were too harsh; that we shouldn't have ganged up on him, but instead each of us talk to him on our own. She said we were heartless bitches, and that she was going through hard times with his stepmom not supporting her transition. She said she was protective of her friends, but that we went too far. I don't think it registered in her mind that most of the underage female people he was harassing also identified as trans, and should've had support from her if the main reason she was against the message was because he was trans.

Others just sided with him because they're white conservative guys in a small Midwestern town that didn't care if he identified as a she, only that he got away with harassing and assaulting multiple girls. The school and police both said that since he was staying away from us now they couldn't do anything. They didn't seem to care that at this point he was a legal adult with pictures of 14-year-old girls' asses on his phone or that there was video evidence of touching me while I was asleep.

He's graduating in a month and moving into an apartment across the street from one of the girls he groped. Her aunt is renting it out to him. And nothing has been done.



To the one who thinks of himself as a feral beastling, old-school angel of ten thousand eyes, divine moonchild who cannot be netted by words so simple as "man" and "woman." To the one who's made everyone with a vagina in our social circle uncomfortable-to-frightened, to the one who made his female partner cry and plead and eventually surrender to the erosion of her boundaries. To the one who told that partner's concerned friends that they were being abusive for having reservations about this. To the one who asked, wheedled, forced his partner to cut those friends out of her life. To the one who has STEM degrees because no one groped them in high school robotics club, who loves to tweet about people staring at him on the street because he relishes the idea of being an enigmatic androgyne who takes his iridescent talons to mundane cis sensibilities, who would cry if I said it's just because he has green hair and you don't usually see that on a white boy in a peacoat. To the one I will never tell that I walk down that same street each night and pray, fucking pray, the guy who likes to scream CUNT CUNT CUNT hasn't come back, because even my bulkiest winter coat does not stop him from knowing what to call me. To the one who can't stop tee-heeing over ickle lesbians, sword lesbians, lesbifriends, girls who love girls. To the one who cannot get through a conversation without making it sexual, without making me sexual, without making us all watch

as he preens and pretends we're all having our brains blown by winking allusions to whatever poly bloodplay indie game dev fuckfest he's meeting an isolated afab no older than 25 at next.

To the one who would like to be described like this: digital sylph from the Geocities gutters, Galatea of rust and stardust, ragtag futa goddess of the hbrowse isles. Maybe, on those days he can't seem to shut up about wanting a wife and girls and huge hentai jugs, a big-dicked bimbo MILF who gets fucked over her own kitchen island. To the one who loves trans women's sacred sleaze, their queer and complex mess that all seems to boil down to whatever's on the first page of /d/ and some lowercase caption boxes about wanting to die but ordering pad thai instead. To the one who believes in daring, difficult, challenging work that always ends up featuring at least one female body being fucked, cut, ripped, whipped, or chained. To the one that finds work about the soul and pain and sovereign self that governs those torn-open tits suspicious, terfy, off-putting, regressive, stupid, shallow, boring, worthless. To the one who cannot buy a turtleneck without talking about big titty librarian gf vibes, who has gotten really into describing himself as a bimbo lately because trans women should be able to talk about the forced femme bimbofication sissy hypno porn that makes up part of their messy, complex truth. To the one who sneers at girls who admit to having loved their ninth grade copies

of To Ride A Silver Broomstick into disrepair. To the one who asks, haven't you heard of Candy Darling, Sandy Stone, Elagabalus? Don't you know that they make the rage that gouts from him whenever Hannah Gadsby/Judy Chicago/Alison Bechdel/bell hooks is mentioned actually very important and worthy of respect? And attention? And funding? And your pussy? And your assurances as he fucks you with a terrifyingly remote anger that he is so silly so dumb so sexy such a hot goth princess bimbo slut?

To the one who became known to me and every other girl on campus as someone you should never be alone with, especially at a party. To the one who was quiet and "nice," artistic and sensitive, who boys shrugged at and disliked, if they disliked him at all, for being pretentious. To the one who looked for the girl on the couch who looked abandoned. To the one who has slowly, steadily left behind every responsibility in favor of becoming a "model," whose brand-new Instagram is tagged with altgirl, hardfemme, cholastyle, subbygirl, sexyback, queergirl, santamuerte, kaliworship, witchymodel, highheels. To the one who has become a "healer," who says he "loves 2 hear shitty people "WARN" others about me! Lol!" To the one who talks about trying to live, to just survive in such a cruel world, god how he just wants to love and be loved in this cishet shitpile of a planet that crushes vulnerable transfemmes like him beneath its bootheel. To the one we never even bothered to

report, because we knew nothing would happen, and it was such a small school, and we were scared, and now we don't talk about at all, even when we're alone, because it's so hard and we're so tired and it's not like we're not already good at keeping quiet about the things he did when he thought we were asleep.

To all of them, who can't possibly be men because: they wear bondage collars and black lipstick, use the words "atomization," "respectability politics," and "materialist" incorrectly, reconstruct their memories of being a teen boy in anime club who stared at the tits of every girl in the room as being complex landmarks on the way to actualization, take lots of pictures of themselves and then make zines about taking lots of pictures of themselves, spend money and time on LARPs run by other men in makeup instead of learning how to cook literally anything, remember birthdays, establish a laundry-doing routine, or discuss a budgeting plan with the girlfriends they have bullied into being silent about all the other women they fuck, buy knives to better inhabit their hard-dicked adolescent conception of what a sexy riotgrrrl probably was except without the terfy pussy stuff, and plus, now with an even-harder, still-present dick, which makes them a deliciously monstrous trans goddess, hecate with a penis, avatar of all that is lavish and licentious, angel in a stretched-tight tattoo choker, which is better, because girls are boring and stupid and only acceptable when they are doing dishes

or playing the part they've been assigned in that night's rendition of Stuttering Catgirl Maid is Fucked Into Insensibility:

I am not crazy.

I am not a liar.

I am not overreacting.

I am not the grist for your mill. I am not your healing spring. I am not the bricks you build your house from. I am not the found materials you use to assemble the outré collage that is your life. I do not exist to generate fantasies for you to browse through, select, and ultimately erase.

I am a woman.

I have found other women like me, and we have excavated the truth from the cankered caverns of bullshit you buried it in. We have dug our heels into the earth, we have nurtured strength like a garden, we have brought to thrilling fucking life every possible metaphor involving the moon, wolves, blood, and witches that you'd sneer at, that maybe I would have once as well as embarrassingly earnest, embarrassingly female, embarrassingly second-wave, that I don't give a single fuck about tearing down any longer because it was fucking real all along and even at its most intense,

nowhere near as embarrassing as Japanese Cartoon Porn Helped Me Understand My Trans Identity. I don't need to read another fucking piece by Grace Lavery, Merritt Kopas, Morgan Page, Porpentine, that one white guy who pretends to be a Muslim woman and talks about how hard it makes his dick, Susan Stryker, whoever made whatever zine you're sharing about how very fucking special it was to be a boy playing the same Newgrounds flash games all the other boys in 8th grade played and used to more evocatively terrorize the girls around them. I've read them all, I've played them all, I know them as intimately as anything can be known because you don't get to be a woman and not become familiar with the contours of the male psyche, even when it's winged its liner and learned just enough about Anarcho-Syndicalism to intimidate other women into shutting up and sitting down. I've gotten through Hot Allostatic Load, Whipping Girl, and We Know The Devil, and as I've met men convinced a lecture on what their dads used to say about men being one way and women another to be the crisp blast of mountain air needed to clear my female brain of its heady concepts of inequality and exploitation, I needn't have bothered.

To you, who rips dreams, sorrows, triumphs, and truths from us to make into clothes, sex toys, jargon for your twitter bio, and ideas to get you hard, to you who dreams of your liberation as the day you need only gather from us like we are each and every one good little

giving trees, bending our trunks to help you reach the ripest fruit. To you who takes bites of us, leaving the core and its seeds behind to grow and wither and live again and again and again and again in stranger, stronger soil. To you, who leave we afabs to soothe people in your wake, clean your toilets, plan your parties, do your dishes, suck your dick. To you, who leaves work to us women, when you run off to be a better kind of girl:

I know who you are.

And shockingly, joyously, ferociously, consumingly, for the rest of my luminous, liberated life: I know who I am, too. And I love her too dearly to ever forget her again.

Kitty Robinson is a lesbian feminist living in Southern Oregon with her partner Max.

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